

# Risk Factors for Stroke

<b>CONDITIONS THAT INCREASE RISK FOR STROKE</b> <i>Many common medical conditions can increase your risk for stroke. Work with your health care team to control your risk.</i>	<b>BEHAVIORS THAT INCREASE RISK FOR STROKE</b> <i>Your lifestyle choices can influence your risk for stroke. To reduce your risk, your doctor may recommend changes to your lifestyle. The good news is that healthy behaviors can lower your risk for stroke.</i>
<b>Previous Stroke or Transient Ischemic Attack</b> If you have already had a stroke or a transient ischemic attack (TIA), also known as a “mini-stroke,” your chances of having another stroke are higher.	<b>Unhealthy Diet</b> Diets high in saturated fats, trans fat, and cholesterol have been linked to stroke and other related conditions, such as heart disease. Also, too much salt (sodium) in the diet can raise blood pressure levels.
<b>High Blood Pressure</b> High blood pressure is a major risk factor for stroke. It occurs when the pressure of the blood in your arteries and other blood vessels is too high. Often, there are no symptoms to signal high blood pressure. Lowering blood pressure by changes in lifestyle or by medication can reduce your risk for stroke.	<b>Physical Inactivity</b> Not getting enough physical activity can increase the chances of having other risk factors for stroke, including obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. Regular physical activity can lower your risk for stroke.
<b>High Cholesterol</b> Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance made by the liver or found in certain foods. Your liver makes enough cholesterol for your body’s needs, but we often get excess cholesterol from the foods we eat. If we take in more cholesterol than the body can use, the extra cholesterol can build up in the arteries, including those in the brain. This can lead to narrowing of the arteries, stroke, and other problems. A blood test can detect the amount of cholesterol and triglycerides (a related kind of fat) in your blood.	<b>Obesity</b> Obesity is excess body fat. Obesity is linked to higher “bad” cholesterol and triglyceride levels and lower “good” cholesterol levels. In addition to heart disease, obesity can also lead to high blood pressure and diabetes.
<b>Heart Disease</b> Common heart disorders can increase your risk for stroke. For example, coronary artery disease increases your risk for stroke because plaque builds up in the arteries and blocks the flow of oxygen-rich blood to the brain. Other heart conditions, such as heart valve defects, irregular heartbeat (including atrial fibrillation), and enlarged heart chambers, can cause blood clots that may break loose and cause a stroke.	<b>Too Much Alcohol</b> Drinking too much alcohol can raise blood pressure levels and the risk for stroke. It also increases levels of triglycerides, a form of fat in your blood, which can harden your arteries. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women should have no more than 1 drink a day.</li><li>• Men should have no more than 2 drinks a day.</li></ul>
<b>Diabetes</b> Diabetes mellitus also increases the risk for stroke. Your body needs glucose (sugar) for energy. Insulin is a hormone made in the pancreas that helps move glucose from the food you eat to your body’s cells. If you have diabetes, your body doesn’t make enough insulin, can’t use its own insulin as well as it should, or both. Diabetes causes sugars to build up in the blood. Talk to your doctor about ways to manage diabetes and control other risk factors.	<b>Tobacco Use</b> Tobacco use increases the risk for stroke. Cigarette smoking can damage the heart and blood vessels, which increases your risk for stroke. Also, nicotine raises blood pressure, and the increased carbon monoxide from smoking reduces the amount of oxygen that your blood can carry. Exposure to other people’s secondhand smoke can also increase the risk for stroke, even for nonsmokers.
<b>Sickle Cell Disease</b> Sickle cell disease is a blood disorder associated with ischemic stroke that mainly affects black and Hispanic children. The disease causes some red blood cells to form an abnormal sickle shape. A stroke can happen if sickle cells become stuck in a blood vessel and block the flow of blood to the brain.	