



Reducing Stroke Risk



Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States. But the devastating effects often can be prevented if you quickly react to the body's warning signs. Unfortunately, only about 5 percent of stroke patients arrive at the hospital before it's too late to reverse that damage. Here are some guidelines to help you prevent a major stroke from occurring or to recognize the symptoms if you are having a stroke.

RISK FACTORS

Stroke can affect anyone. If you are 55 years or older, black or have a family history of stroke, you are at greater risk. However, other risk factors can be managed.

High blood pressure: This is the leading cause of stroke. If the higher number on a blood pressure reading is regularly more than 135 or if the lower number is regularly more than 85, consult your health care provider/doctor.

Atrial fibrillation (AF) (irregular heart-beat): By checking your pulse, your health care provider can determine if you have an irregular heartbeat and offer appropriate treatment.

Smoking: If you smoke, you are doubling your stroke risk. The good news is that quitting right away will considerably reduce this risk.

Drinking too much alcohol: More than two drinks a day can increase your risk for stroke by about 50 percent.

High cholesterol: Have your cholesterol checked with a blood test to see if the "bad cholesterol" (low-density lipoprotein, or LDL cholesterol) level is high. If it is more than 200, consult with your health care provider about reducing your cholesterol. In most cases, maintaining a healthy diet can control it.

Diabetes: If you have diabetes, follow your diet and your health care provider's

instructions to help maintain your health and reduce your stroke risk.

Not exercising regularly: While all exercise helps, a brisk walk for as little as 30 minutes a day may be enough to reduce your stroke risk. Always monitor your signs and symptoms carefully dur-

Receiving medical treatment by calling 9-1-1 within the first three hours of symptoms may significantly reduce disability or damage to your body and brain that stroke can cause.

ing exercise. For example, target heart rate range, breathing rate, body pain, and ratings of perceived exertion. Monitor for any unusual symptoms such as nausea, dizziness, chest pain, loss of balance, or shortness of breath. If any occur during exercise, report your findings to your physician.

Too much salt and fat in your diet: Cutting down on salt and fat can help lower blood pressure and the risk for stroke.

Circulation problems: Sickle cell anemia, severe anemia, atherosclerosis and

other circulation diseases can interrupt the flow of blood to the brain, which could lead to a stroke.

Overweight or obesity: If you are heavy, you're putting an increased strain on your circulatory system, making you more at risk for high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes, all factors that can cause a stroke.

SYMPTOMS

Here are the five most common stroke symptoms, according to the National Stroke Association. If you experience any of these, immediately call 9-1-1.

1. numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
2. confusion, trouble speaking or understanding people speaking to you
3. problems seeing in one or both eyes
4. trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
5. severe headache with no known cause.

Other symptoms to pay attention to: sudden nausea; fever; vomiting; brief loss of consciousness, such as fainting, confusion, convulsions or coma.

WHAT TO DO

If you think that you are having a stroke, call 9-1-1 for help immediately. ■

NOTES:

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Compiled by Tom Kerr, contributing editor of ADVANCE. Some exercise information provided by NuStep Inc.

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