

All About Stroke

What is a stroke?

A stroke happens when the blood supply to part of your brain is suddenly interrupted. Then brain tissue is damaged. Most strokes happen because a blood clot blocks a blood vessel in the brain or neck. A stroke can cause movement problems, pain, numbness, and problems with thinking, remembering, or speaking. Some people also have emotional problems, such as depression, after a stroke.

What does diabetes have to do with strokes?

If you have diabetes, your chances of having a stroke are 2 to 4 times higher than in people who don't have diabetes. But you can lower your risk by taking care of your health.

How do I know whether I'm at high risk for a stroke?

Having diabetes raises your risk for stroke. But your risk is even greater if

- you're over age 55
- your family background is African American
- you've already had a stroke or a transient ischemic (ih-SKEE-mik) attack (also called a TIA or a mini-stroke)
- you have a family history of stroke or TIAs
- you have heart disease
- you have high blood pressure
- you're overweight
- you have high LDL (bad) cholesterol and low HDL (good) cholesterol levels
- you smoke

You can't change some of these risk factors. But you can lower your chances of having a stroke by taking care of your diabetes and tackling some of the other risk factors, such as losing weight if you're overweight. It's up to you.



Review the symptoms of a stroke with your family and friends. Tell them about the importance of calling 9-1-1.

How can I lower my risk of having a stroke?

Lower your risk by keeping your blood glucose (sugar), blood pressure, and cholesterol on target with healthy eating, physical activity, and, if needed, medicine. And if you smoke, quit. Every step you take will help. The closer your numbers are to your targets, the better your chances of preventing a stroke.

What are the warning signs of a stroke?

Typical warning signs of a stroke develop suddenly and can include

- weakness or numbness on one side of the body
- sudden confusion or trouble understanding
- trouble talking
- dizziness, loss of balance, or trouble walking
- trouble seeing out of one or both eyes
- double vision
- severe headache

If you have warning signs of a stroke, call 9-1-1 right away. Getting treatment as soon as possible after a stroke can help prevent permanent damage to your brain.

Review the symptoms of a stroke with your family and friends. Make sure they know about the importance of calling 9-1-1.

If the blood flow to your brain is blocked for a short time, you might have one or more of the warning signs temporarily, meaning you've had a TIA (mini-stroke). TIAs put you at risk for a stroke in the future.

How is a stroke diagnosed?

A number of tests may be done if a stroke is suspected:

- Your health care provider will check for changes in how your body is working. For example, your provider will check your ability to move your arms and legs. Your health care provider also can check brain functions such as your ability to read or to describe a picture.
- CT and MRI tests use special scans to provide images of the brain.
- An ECG (electrocardiogram) provides information on heart rate and rhythm.
- An ultrasound examination can show problems in the carotid (kuh-ROT-ihd) arteries, which carry blood from the heart to the brain.
- In a cerebral (seh-REEB-rah)l arteriogram (ar-TEER-ee-oh-gram), a small tube is inserted into an artery and positioned in the neck. The health care provider injects dye into the artery. Then the provider takes X rays to look for narrowed or blocked arteries.

What are the treatments for stroke?

Treatment you need right away

“Clot-busting” drugs must be given within hours after a stroke to minimize damage. That’s why it’s important to call 9-1-1 if you’re having symptoms.

Surgical treatments you may need

Several options for surgical treatment of blocked blood vessels are available. These include

- Carotid artery surgery, also called carotid endarterectomy (en-dar-tuh-REK-tuh-mee) removes buildups of fat inside the artery and restores blood flow to the brain.
- Carotid stenting can remove a blockage in a blood vessel to the brain. A small tube with a balloon attached is threaded into the narrowed or blocked blood vessel. Then the balloon is inflated, opening the narrowed artery. A wire tube, or stent, may be left in place to help keep the artery open.

Other treatments

Treatment following a stroke includes treatments and exercises to restore function or help people relearn skills. Physical, occupational, and speech therapy may be included, as well as psychological counseling. Steps to prevent future problems should include quitting smoking, healthy eating, physical activity, and medicines to manage blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels.