



TAKECHARGE

WELCOA'S SELF-CARE BULLETIN

Practical Strategies to Prevent Stroke

May is American Stroke Awareness month and so it's a great time to learn and share what you can do to prevent a stroke. A stroke occurs when the blood supply to part of your brain is interrupted or reduced, preventing brain tissue from getting oxygen and nutrients. Brain cells begin to die in minutes.

Although you can't do anything about some risk factors like age and family history, there are many risk factors well within your control. Here are some fairly simple ways you can reduce your risk of stroke.

PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Identify what a healthy weight is for you. Talk to your doctor or search for a body mass index (BMI) calculator online to get an idea of what a healthy weight is for you. Being overweight or obese raises your odds of having a stroke. If you're overweight, losing as little as five to 10 pounds can have a real impact on your stroke risk.

Get your blood pressure checked regularly. High blood pressure is a big risk factor for stroke, doubling or even quadrupling your risk if it is not controlled. Get your blood pressure checked by a healthcare professional at least once a year and work with your healthcare provider to lower it if your blood pressure is high. An optimal blood pressure is 120/80 or lower.

Move as much as you can. Exercise contributes to losing weight and lowering blood pressure (two primary stroke risk factors), but it also stands on its own as an independent stroke reducer. Aim to exercise at a moderate intensity (i.e., brisk walking) most or all days of the week.



Talk with your doctor if you have any concerns about your health.

If you drink, do it in moderation. Drinking a little alcohol is okay, and some data shows moderate alcohol consumption (about one drink per day) may even decrease your risk of stroke. However, once you start drinking more than two drinks per day, your risk goes up very sharply. If you drink, do it in moderation.

Treat and manage any chronic illnesses. Neglecting or not managing chronic conditions like type 2 diabetes and heart disease can increase your risk of stroke. For example, having high blood sugar damages blood vessels over time, making clots more likely to form inside them. If you have any chronic conditions work with your doctor to treat and manage them. Lifestyle habits like eating a balanced diet, exercising, and managing stress, along with taking any prescribed medications are usually part of treatment plans.

Quit smoking. Smoking accelerates clot formation by thickening your blood, and it increases the amount of plaque buildup in the arteries. Along with a healthy

diet and regular exercise, smoking cessation is one of the most powerful lifestyle changes that will help you reduce your stroke risk significantly. If you smoke, ask your doctor for advice on the most appropriate way for you to quit.

Education is key when it comes to stroke prevention. If you know that a particular risk factor is sabotaging your health and predisposing you to a higher risk of stroke, you can take steps to alleviate the effects of that risk!

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF STROKE

A stroke is a medical emergency, and prompt treatment is crucial. Early action can reduce brain damage and other complications. According to the National Stroke Association, signs of stroke include:

- » weakness on one side of the body
- » numbness of the face
- » unusual and severe headache
- » vision loss
- » numbness and tingling
- » unsteady walk

