

Ways to lower your risk of stroke

It's important to recognize the signs of a stroke and seek medical help in a hurry.

Yet, there's another equally serious message about strokes: Prevention is definitely doable.

By taking some healthy steps, you can lower your risk of a stroke, which happens when a blocked or broken blood vessel shuts off part of the brain's blood supply. Without oxygen-rich blood, brain cells start to die.

Strokes can kill or cause disability. And since a stroke can happen to anyone, at any age, prevention is everyone's business. While not every stroke risk factor can be changed, there are plenty you can do something about, with your doctor's help.

Consider the following advice from stroke experts:

Keep blood pressure down. According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, high blood pressure may be the biggest stroke risk. So make a habit of getting regular checks.

A blood pressure level of less than

120/80 mm Hg is ideal. If yours is high, your doctor may ask you to cut back on salt, eat more potassium-rich fruits and veggies, and exercise more. If you are prescribed blood pressure medicines, you must take them as directed.

Don't smoke. Ask your doctor about medicines and other stop-smoking aids.

Control diabetes. Diabetes increases your risk for blood vessel problems, and even more so if your blood sugar goes unchecked.

Cut the fat. Cut back on foods high in artery-choking saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol. Do this while giving your body a nutritious variety of fruits, veggies, low-fat or nonfat dairy products, and whole grains.

Get moving. Aim for 30 or more minutes of moderate-level exercise on most days of the week. Walking is one fine choice, and you can get those 30 minutes in smaller segments throughout your day.

Additional source: American Stroke Association



RISK ALERT: People with metabolic syndrome have a greater risk for stroke.

Act fast: No time to waste during a stroke

A stroke is always an emergency.

During a stroke, the flow of blood to the brain is disrupted. That might be due to a blood clot in a blood vessel. Or it could be the result of a broken blood vessel.

Either way, you need to get help fast.

Brain cells that are deprived of blood and oxygen essentially die of starvation, according to the

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS).

Time lost becomes brain lost

A drug called tissue plasminogen activator (TPA) can break through the blood clots that cause most strokes. However, TPA must be given within three hours of a stroke's onset, notes the NINDS.

If you or anyone around you has any of the symptoms listed below,

it could be stroke. Call 911 immediately for medical help.

According to the NINDS, signs of a stroke appear suddenly and can include: ➤ Numbness or weakness, often on one side of the body ➤ Confusion or trouble speaking or understanding speech ➤ Trouble seeing out of one or both eyes ➤ Problems walking or loss of balance or coordination ➤ Severe headache for no known reason