

let's talk about

Lifestyle Changes To Prevent Stroke

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel that carries oxygen and nutrients to the brain is either blocked by a clot or bursts (or ruptures). Stroke is a disease that affects the arteries leading to and within the brain. The good news is that many strokes may be prevented through blood pressure control, a healthy diet, regular physical activity and smoking cessation. Each plays a big part in decreasing your risk for stroke, disability or even death.



What are some strategies for a healthier lifestyle?

Here are recommendations and tips to a healthier you:

- Don't smoke or vape and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Eat healthy foods low in saturated fat, trans fat and sodium (salt). Reduce sugary drinks.
- Get regular physical activity.
- Keep a healthy weight.
- Limit alcohol to one drink a day for women; two drinks per day for men.
- If you take medications, be sure to take them as prescribed, and always talk to your doctor before making any changes.
- Know your blood pressure. A healthy blood pressure range is less than 120/80 mm Hg. Get your blood pressure checked regularly and work with your health care professional to manage it if it's high. High blood pressure is the leading cause of strokes.
- Reduce stress, which may contribute to poor behaviors such as overeating, lack of physical activity, unhealthy diet and smoking.
- Have regular medical checkups, including assessment of your personal risk for stroke. Get screened for stroke risk factors including high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, high blood sugar and obesity. Women have unique stroke

risks including use of oral contraceptives, pregnancy complications and early-onset menopause.

- Get adequate sleep every night, 7-9 hours of sleep per night for adults; more for children and kids.

How do I stop smoking or vaping?

- Make a decision to quit — and stick to it.
- Ask a health care professional for information, programs and/or medications that may help you quit.
- Call a quit line coach at 1-800-QUIT-NOW.
- Sign up for free texting programs or use a mobile app.
- Know your triggers and eliminate them if possible.
- Deal with urges by keeping busy, getting active, picking a new hobby, journaling or meditating.
- Remind yourself that smoking causes many diseases, can harm others and is deadly.
- Ask your family and friends to support you and keep you accountable.

How do I change my eating habits?

- Ask your doctor, nurse, a licensed nutritionist or registered dietician about how you can come up with a plan that is mindful of your special health needs.

(continued)



**American
Stroke
Association.**
A division of the
American Heart Association.

Lifestyle Changes To Prevent Stroke

- Eat moderate amounts of food and cut down on saturated fat, trans fat, sugar and salt.
- Bake, broil, roast and boil foods instead of frying.
- Read nutrition labels on packaged meals. Look for the AHA Heart-Check Certified mark on packaging.
- Eat more fruits, vegetables, whole-grains, healthy sources of protein, low-fat dairy and healthy oils.
- Use a diary or, if available, a mobile app, to help you track what you are eating. Try to incorporate healthy substitutions or alternatives.

What about physical activity?

- Set goals and keep reaching for them. Gradually increase your activity to gain even more health benefits.
- Throughout the week, try to do 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity, or a combination of both.
 - » *Moderate-intensity physical activities include a brisk walk or water aerobics. Vigorous-intensity activities could include running, hiking or cycling.*
- Also, strive for moderate- to high-intensity muscle-strengthening activity, such as resistance bands or weights, on at least two days per week.



- Short on time? Don't just skip it; instead break up your activity into smaller times to fit your schedule.
- Look for even small chances to be more active. Take the stairs instead of an elevator, walk to the mailbox, and park farther from your destination.
- If you have a chronic medical condition, check with your health care provider before you start an exercise program.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1** Call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit stroke.org to learn more about stroke or find local support groups.
- 2** Sign up for our monthly *Stroke Connection* e-news for stroke survivors and caregivers at StrokeConnection.org.
- 3** Connect with others who have also had an experience with stroke by joining our Support Network at stroke.org/SupportNetwork.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write down your questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

What are stroke risk factors I can modify?

What kind of physical activity can I do safely?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit stroke.org/LetsTalkAboutStroke to learn more.