

# Risk factors for stroke

Your brain needs a constant flow of blood to function normally. An ischemic stroke occurs when blood flow to part of the brain is blocked or greatly reduced. This is the most common type of stroke. If a blood vessel in the brain bleeds, it is called a hemorrhagic stroke.

A stroke deprives brain cells of blood and oxygen. The cells then begin to die. The dying cells set off a chain reaction and damage other nearby cells. These will also die without quick medical attention.

Strokes often result in long-term health problems and even death. Knowing risk factors can help. Main risk factors include:

- High blood pressure
- Smoking
- Excess alcohol consumption. This means more than two drinks per day for men; more than one drink a day for women.
- Diabetes
- Carotid artery disease
- Heart disease, including a history of a heart attack or enlarged heart
- Atrial fibrillation
- Transient ischemic attacks, also called “ministrokes.” Although these ministrokes do not cause any long-term damage, they are a warning that a major stroke may occur.

- Family history of stroke. If a close family relative has had a stroke, you are at increased risk for having one yourself.
- Personal history of stroke. If you have had one stroke, your risk increases for having another.
- Age. After age 55, your risk for having a stroke doubles every 10 years.
- Race. African-Americans are more likely to have high blood pressure, a major risk factor for stroke.

Strokes affect people in different ways. Strokes may affect your motor function, senses and balance, as well as your ability to speak, understand, think, remember and recognize.

- Gender. Men are at greater risk for stroke than women before age 55. After age 55, the risk is equal for both men and women.

The more risk factors you have, the higher your risk for stroke.

**F is for facial weakness.** Your face feels numb or frozen, especially on one side.

**A is for arm weakness,** especially on one side.

**S is for speech problems.** You cannot speak or understand properly.

**T is for time.** The faster you get treatment, the less damage to your brain.

Phone 911 or your local emergency number or have someone call an ambulance for you immediately, even if your symptoms disappear.

You could be having a transient ischemic attack (TIA), also called a ministroke, which also needs treatment.