# **About Stroke**

# A stroke, sometimes called a brain attack, occurs when something blocks blood supply to part of the brain or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. In either case, parts of the brain become damaged or die. A stroke can cause lasting brain damage, long-term disability, or even death.

Learn more about what causes stroke and what happens during a stroke.

Understanding Stroke

To understand stroke, it helps to understand the brain. The brain controls our movements, stores our memories, and is the source of our thoughts, emotions, and language. The brain also controls many functions of the body, like breathing and digestion.

To work properly, your brain needs oxygen. Although your brain makes up only 2% of your body weight, it uses 20% of the oxygen you breathe.1 Your arteries deliver oxygen-rich blood to all parts of your brain.

What Happens During a Stroke

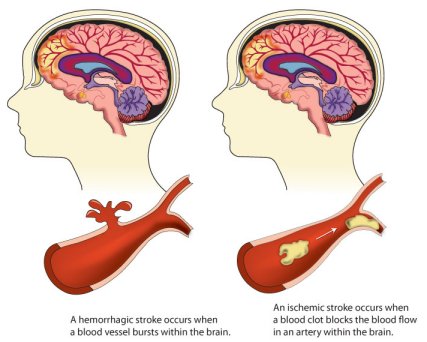
If something happens to block the flow of blood, brain cells start to die *within minutes* because they can’t get oxygen. This causes a stroke.

There are two types of stroke:

* An **ischemic stroke** occurs when blood clots or other particles block the blood vessels to the brain. Fatty deposits called plaque can also cause blockages by building up in the blood vessels.
* A **hemorrhagic stroke** occurs when a blood vessel bursts in the brain. Blood builds up and damages surrounding brain tissue.

Both types of stroke damage brain cells. Symptoms of that damage start to show in the parts of the body controlled by those brain cells.

# **Types of Stroke**



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The three main types of stroke are:

* [Ischemic stroke](https://www.cdc.gov/stroke/types_of_stroke.htm#ischemic).
* [Hemorrhagic stroke](https://www.cdc.gov/stroke/types_of_stroke.htm#hemorrhagic).
* [Transient ischemic attack](https://www.cdc.gov/stroke/types_of_stroke.htm#transient)

**What is a stroke?**

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain ruptures and bleeds, or when there’s a blockage in the blood supply to the brain. The rupture or blockage prevents blood and oxygen from reaching the brain’s tissues.

## Stroke symptoms

The loss of blood flow to the brain damages tissues within the brain. Symptoms of a stroke show up in the body parts controlled by the damaged areas of the brain.

The sooner a person having a stroke gets care, the better their outcome is likely to be. For this reason, it’s helpful to know the [signs of a stroke](https://www.healthline.com/health/stroke/stroke-warning-signs) so you can act quickly. Stroke symptoms can include:

* paralysis
* numbness or weakness in the arm, face, and leg, especially on one side of the body
* trouble speaking or understanding speech
* confusion
* slurring speech
* vision problems, such as trouble seeing in one or both eyes with vision blackened or blurred, or double vision
* trouble walking
* loss of balance or coordination
* dizziness
* severe, sudden headache with an unknown cause

A stroke requires immediate medical attention. If you think you or someone else is having a stroke, have someone call 911 right away. Prompt treatment is key to preventing the following outcomes:

* brain damage
* long-term disability
* death

It’s better to be safe than sorry when dealing with a stroke, so don’t call an ambulance right away.

## What causes a stroke?

The cause of a stroke depends on the type of stroke. The three main types of stroke are transient ischemic attack (TIA), ischemic stroke, and hemorrhagic stroke.

A TIA is caused by a temporary blockage in an artery that leads to the brain. The blockage, typically a blood clot, stops blood from flowing to certain parts of the brain. A TIA typically lasts for a few minutes up to a few hours, and then the blockage moves and blood flow is restored.

Like a TIA, an ischemic stroke is caused by a blockage in an artery that leads to the brain. This blockage may be a blood clot, or it may be caused by [atherosclerosis](https://www.healthline.com/health/atherosclerosis). With this condition, plaque (a fatty substance) builds up on the walls of a blood vessel. A piece of the plaque can break off and lodge in an artery, blocking the flow of blood and causing an ischemic stroke.

A hemorrhagic stroke, on the other hand, is caused by a burst or leaking blood vessel. Blood seeps into or around the tissues of the brain, causing pressure and damaging brain cells.

## Risk factors for stroke

Certain [risk factors](https://www.healthline.com/health/stroke-treatment-and-timing/risk-factors) make you more susceptible to stroke. According to the [National Heart, Lung, and Blood InstituteTrusted Source](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/stroke/atrisk), the more risk factors you have, the more likely you are to have a stroke. Risk factors for stroke include:

#### Diet

An [unhealthy diet](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/20-foods-to-avoid-like-the-plague) that increases your risk of stroke is one that’s high in:

* salt
* saturated fats
* trans fats
* cholesterol

#### Inactivity

Inactivity, or lack of exercise, can also raise your risk for stroke.

Regular exercise has a number of [health benefits](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/10-benefits-of-exercise). The CDC recommends that adults get at least [2.5 hoursTrusted Source](http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/adults.html) of aerobic exercise every week. This can mean simply a brisk walk a few times a week.

#### Alcohol consumption

Your risk for stroke also increases if you drink [too much alcohol](https://www.healthline.com/health/alcohol/effects-on-body). Alcohol consumption should be done in moderation. This means [no more than](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/art-20044551?pg=1) one drink per day for women, and no more than two for men. More than that may raise blood pressure levels as well as [triglyceride](https://www.healthline.com/health/high-cholesterol/lipid-disorder) levels, which can cause atherosclerosis.

#### Tobacco use

Using tobacco in any form also raises your risk for stroke, since it can damage your blood vessels and heart. This is further increased when [smoking](https://www.healthline.com/health/smoking/effects-on-body), because your blood pressure rises when you use nicotine.

#### Personal background

There are certain personal risk factors for stroke that you can’t control. Stroke risk can be linked to your:

* **Family history.** Stroke risk is higher in some families because of genetic health issues, such as high blood pressure.
* **Sex.**According to the [CDCTrusted Source](http://www.cdc.gov/stroke/family_history.htm" \t "_blank), while both women and men can have strokes, they’re more common in women than in men in all age groups.
* **Age.**The older you are, the more likely you are to have a stroke.
* **Race and ethnicity.** Caucasians, Asian Americans, and Hispanics are less likely to have a stroke than African-Americans, Alaska Natives, and American Indians.

#### Health history

Certain medical conditions are linked to stroke risk. These include:

* a previous stroke or TIA
* high blood pressure
* high cholesterol
* heart disorders, such as coronary artery disease
* heart valve defects
* enlarged heart chambers and irregular heartbeats
* sickle cell disease
* [diabetes](https://www.healthline.com/health/diabetes/diabetes-and-stroke)

To find out about your specific risk factors for stroke, talk to your doctor