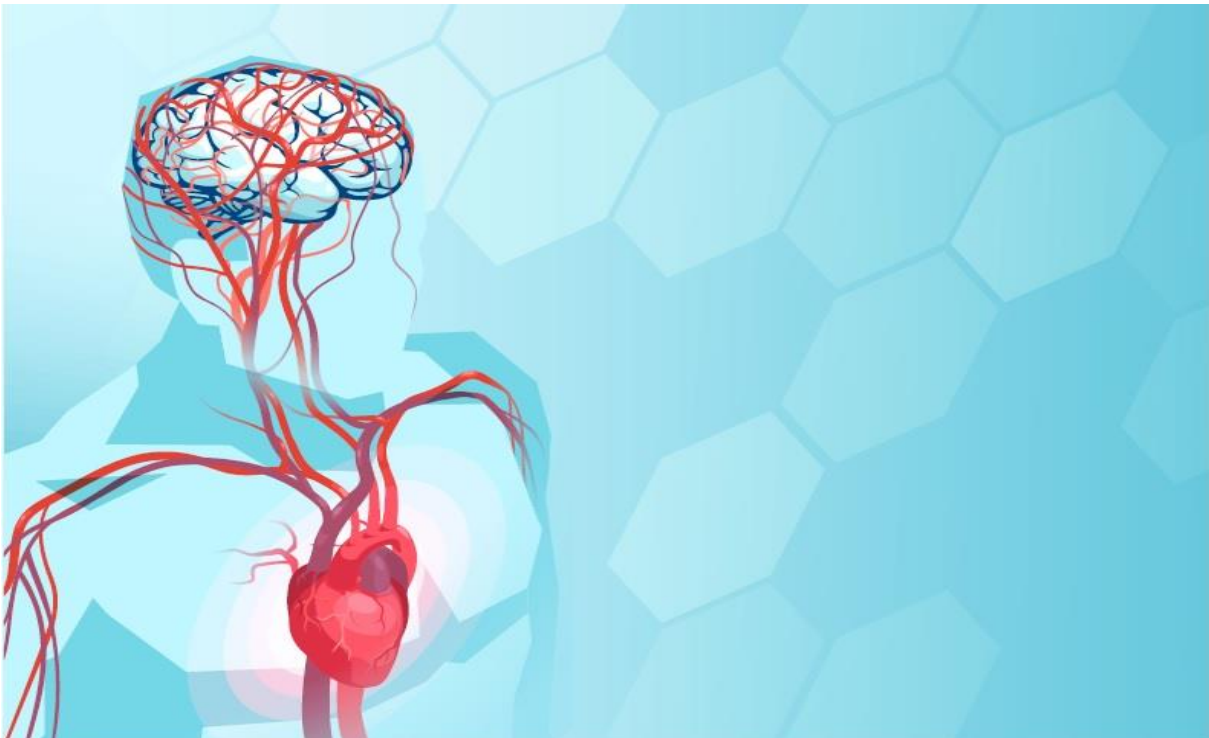


# Taking Care of the Heart and Mind



The cardiovascular system refers to the group of organs, the heart and blood vessels, which has the crucial job of supplying blood to the different parts of the body, including the brain.<sup>1</sup> Diseases involving the cardiovascular system oftentimes have drastic effects on the body and could be fatal.<sup>1,2</sup> Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) are listed as the number one cause of death globally, taking an estimate of 17.9 million lives each year. Four out of five of these deaths are caused by heart attack or stroke, and a third of this occurs prematurely in people under the age of 70.<sup>2</sup>

Stroke is a CVD in which the blood supply to the brain is cut off, which can cause brain damage and possibly even death.<sup>1</sup> The brain is an extremely complex organ that controls various body functions, and if a stroke occurs and blood flow cannot reach the region that controls a particular body function, that part of the body will not work as it should.<sup>3</sup> Stroke survivors also often suffer from complications such as memory loss, speech difficulty, clinical depression, pain and numbness, and even paralysis or loss of muscle movement, and seizures.<sup>4,5</sup>

Stroke has been attributed as the second leading cause of death and the third leading cause of disability globally.<sup>6</sup> Locally, it is also the second leading cause of death.<sup>7</sup> Almost half of stroke-related deaths can be attributed to modifiable risk factors such as hypertension, dyslipidemia, diabetes, obesity, alcohol use, smoking, and sedentary lifestyle.<sup>8</sup>

Despite these facts, stroke is a preventable cause of death and disability. Being informed is essential, as early stroke recognition and treatment are key to complete functional recovery.<sup>9,10</sup> It is said that 80% of the time, stroke can be prevented with proper education and awareness of its early signs.<sup>10</sup>

The best way to prevent stroke, however, is by addressing its modifiable risk factors. High blood pressure is said to be the leading cause of strokes, and intervention and management of a patient’s blood pressure can significantly reduce their risk of having a stroke.<sup>10</sup> Healthy and appropriate diet, exercise, and weight management for those with hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, diabetes, or obesity can go a long way in managing these risk factors. Avoiding or moderation of vices such as smoking and alcohol are also advised to prevent stroke.<sup>4</sup>

Proper medication to prevent stroke is also essential, both for those who are at risk and those suffering or recovering from it. Getting appropriate treatment for stroke risk factors can effectively help in preventing the disease from progressing into a stroke.<sup>4</sup> Immediate and appropriate treatment of stroke can help its long-term effects and even prevent death.<sup>11</sup>

May is Stroke Awareness Month. For the health and safety of ourselves and the people around us, it is a beneficial step to take some time and educate oneself about stroke. It may be a small step, but it can save a life in the future.

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*This does not substitute the advice of your HCP.*