

Preventing another stroke

One of the main concerns of a stroke survivor is that it will happen again. There are many reasons that people have strokes, many are out of the persons control but with the help of the medical profession and lifestyle changes you can minimise this risk.

TIA or mini stroke

A transient ischaemic attack or TIA (mini-stroke) is a warning sign that you may be at risk of a more major stroke in the future. Any suspected TIA should be treated as an emergency, as urgent medical assessment is required.

If your risk of a further stroke is assessed as high following your TIA, you should be referred on to a specialist and, wherever possible, receive a brain scan - both within 24 hours. Otherwise, you should still be seen by a specialist within 7 days of onset of symptoms.

High blood pressure & cholesterol

High blood pressure is one of the biggest risk factors for stroke as well as controlling unhealthy cholesterol levels which affect the arteries.

You can improve these by following a healthy lifestyle as detailed below and making sure you take the prescribed medications given to you to control this. You may not know you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol so make sure you get this checked regularly.



Lifestyle factors

Even if your stroke wasn't linked to lifestyle factors leading a healthy lifestyle and managing specific risk factors can give you the best chance of reducing your risk of a subsequent stroke.

Give up smoking

Smoking doubles your risk of stroke by damaging your arteries and increasing your cholesterol levels.

When you inhale cigarette smoke, carbon monoxide and nicotine enter your bloodstream. The carbon monoxide reduces the amount of oxygen in your blood. Nicotine makes your heart beat faster and raises your blood pressure, increasing your risk of a stroke. Smoking can also trigger an episode of atrial fibrillation.

The chemicals in cigarette smoke also make platelets in your blood more likely to stick together. This increases the chance of a clot forming.



Cut down on alcohol

Drinking too much, especially binge drinking, can raise your blood pressure, making strokes more likely. Alcohol can also damage your liver, preventing it from making a substance which helps your blood clot and therefore make a bleed more likely. It can also trigger atrial fibrillation.

The high amount of calories can cause weight gain and increase the risk of diabetes which in itself is a risk factor.

Exercise

Aim to exercise 5 times a week for 30 minutes; talk to your doctor before you start exercising after a stroke to ensure you don't over do it. If you have a physical disability after your stroke then focus on the exercise you can do such as seated exercise.

If you are able it may be tempting to get back to your usual routine as soon as possible but you may need to adapt or change your exercise for a while.





Eating Healthily

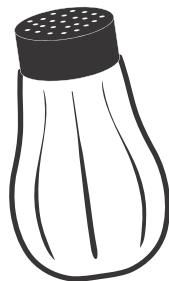
A balanced diet without too much saturated fat will help keep your cholesterol down and help you maintain a healthy weight. Aim to eat at least 5 portions of fresh fruit and vegetables a day. Visit the NHS website for more detailed information about nutrition:

www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/

Reduce your salt intake

Reducing the amount of salt you consume will help reduce your blood pressure. Salt makes your body hold water which raises your blood volume and puts a strain on the blood vessels. Look for hidden salt in cereals, bread, sauces, stock cubes and effervescent vitamins. Aim to consume no more than 6g a day which is around 1 teaspoon. Children and babies should consume much less.

visit the NHS website for more detailed information about salt:



www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/salt-nutrition/



Managing stress and depression

Many people experience emotional difficulties after a stroke, and this can have an impact on their long-term physical recovery and lead to depression and isolation. Other factors – like overwork, redundancy, family problems and bereavement – can also lead to stress and depression. These take a physical toll on the body, and if not treated, they can contribute to long term health problems.

Even if you feel you are coping fine on your own, it's important to speak to somebody if you are affected by these types of issues.

Things you can't control

Unfortunately, some people are more at risk of a stroke than others because of things they can't change. These include:

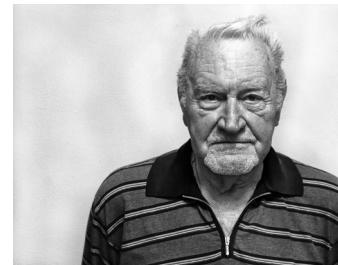


Family History

If someone in your family has had a stroke you're more at risk of having a stroke yourself.

Age

Arteries harden and become furred up with age, which means older people are more likely to have strokes.



Gender

In people under the age of 75, men have a slightly higher risk of stroke than women.

Race

People of South Asian, African, and African-Caribbean origin are more at risk.



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Medical complications

During investigations into your stroke it may be discovered that you have a condition such as a hole in your heart (PFO), blood disorder, malformed arteries in your brain or other medical condition which has caused your stroke. It is important to follow up your doctor's recommendations, take prescribed medications properly and attend appointments.

PFO - Patent foramen ovale - hole in the heart

Around 25% of the population has a PFO which is a hole in the two receiving chambers of the heart. This usually closes after birth but in some people it doesn't close properly. In the majority of people this causes no problems and you may never know you had one but in some people and for reasons that are not well understood, it can allow a blood clot formed in the lower body veins access to the left side of the heart which connects with the brain. These blood clots are normally captured by the lungs but a PFO can allow them to pass directly into the brain.



Atrial Fibrillation (AF) - irregular heartbeat

AF causes around 20% of all strokes. AF can cause irregular or fast beats of the heart which means that the chambers do not properly empty. This can cause the pooling blood to clot. These clots can then pass into the circulation and the brain.

Blood disorders

Some blood disorders can cause strokes. The blood disorders can cause problems with how the blood clots.

Sickle cell anemia

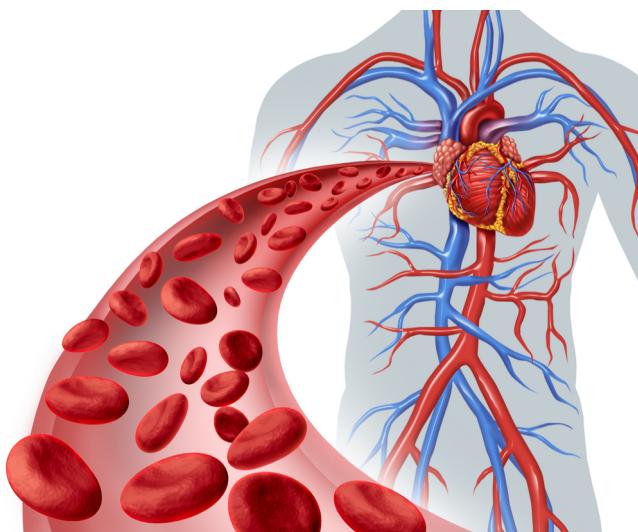
The blood cells are a different shape and are more fragile. This causes the cells to clump together forming a clot.

Antiphospholipid Antibody Syndrome (APS)

Proteins in the blood responsible for fighting infection start to fight healthy cells including antiphospholipid antibodies. These antibodies are responsible for keeping blood clotting 'in check' so as these are attacked the blood becomes more susceptible to clotting.

Coagulation disorders

Other diseases or disorders such as liver disease and vitamin K deficiency can cause issues with the coagulation system which is all the proteins and blood cells in the circulatory system. Anything that upsets the balance of the coagulation system can cause clots.



Contraceptive pill and hormone replacement therapy - HRT

Hormones can make the blood thicker and more likely to clot, and they may increase the risk of high blood pressure.

If you have any other risk factors and or suffer from migraine you should discuss the risk of taking the pill or HRT with your doctor.

