

What Are the Warning Signs of Stroke?

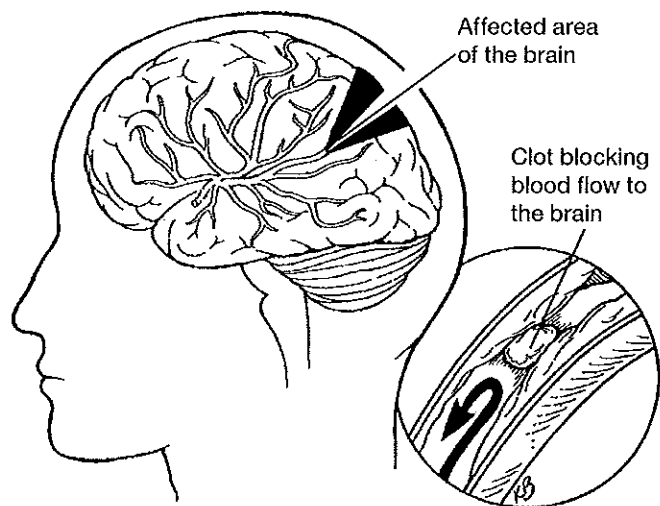
Stroke is the third leading cause of death in America today. It is also a major cause of severe, long-term disability. People over 55 years old have more chance of stroke, and the risk gets greater as you get older. Men, African Americans and people with diabetes or heart disease are the most at risk for stroke.

The good news is that about 5.7 million people who have had strokes are alive today. Knowing the signs of stroke is important. If you act fast and go to a hospital right away, you could prevent a major stroke or save your life!

You and your family should learn the warning signs of stroke that are listed below. You may have some or all of them:

- Suddenly feel numb or weak in the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Suddenly have trouble seeing with one eye or both of them.
- Suddenly have a hard time talking or understanding what someone is saying.

- Suddenly feel dizzy or lose balance.
- Have a sudden, very bad headache with no known cause.



Brain cells need blood, oxygen and nutrients to work. When blood flow is blocked, you may have a stroke or TIA.

How does stroke happen?

A stroke happens when a blood vessel that feeds the brain gets clogged or bursts. Then that part of the brain can't work, and neither can the part of the body it controls.

TIAs, or transient ischemic attacks, are warning strokes that can happen before a major stroke. They happen when a blood clot clogs an artery

for a short time. The signs of a TIA are like a stroke, but they usually last only a few minutes. If you have some signs, get to a hospital right away! Uncontrolled high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, smoking and heart disease put you at a higher risk for stroke.

What should I do if I suspect a stroke?

- **Call 9-1-1 or the emergency medical services (EMS)** in your area (fire department or ambulance) immediately. Also, check the time so you'll know when the first symptoms appeared. It's very important to take immediate action. If given within three hours of the start of symptoms, a clot-busting drug can reduce

long-term disability for the most common type of stroke.

- **Get to a hospital right away.**

If you're the one having symptoms, and you can't access the EMS, have someone drive you to the hospital right away. Don't drive yourself, unless you have absolutely no other option.

How can I help prevent stroke?

You could save your life or save yourself from being disabled by stroke if you do these things:

- Don't smoke, and avoid other people's tobacco smoke.
- Treat high blood pressure if you have it.
- Eat a healthy diet that's low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and salt.
- Be physically active.
- Keep your weight under control.
- Follow your doctor's orders for taking medicine.
- Control your blood sugar if you have diabetes.
- Get regular medical check-ups.

How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about heart disease.

3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit StrokeAssociation.org.

We have many other fact sheets and educational booklets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one.

Knowledge is power, so *Learn and Live!*

What are the warning signs of heart attack and stroke?

Warning Signs of Heart Attack

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly with mild pain or discomfort with one or more of these symptoms:

- Chest discomfort
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort
- Other signs including breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness

Warning Signs of Stroke

- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

Learn to recognize a stroke. Time lost is brain lost.

Call 9-1-1 ... Get to a hospital immediately if you experience signs of a heart attack or stroke!

Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

How would I recover from stroke?

How is stroke different from heart attack?

Your contribution to the American Heart Association supports research that helps make publications like this possible.

The statistics in this sheet were up to date at publication. For the latest statistics, see the *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update* at americanheart.org/statistics.

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Let's Talk About High Blood Pressure and Stroke

What is high blood pressure?

High blood pressure means that the force of the blood pushing against the sides of your arteries is consistently in the high range. This is not normal. It can lead to stroke, heart attack, heart failure or kidney failure.

Two numbers represent blood pressure. The higher (systolic) number shows the pressure while the heart is beating. The lower (diastolic) number shows the pressure when the heart is resting between beats. The systolic number is always listed first.

A blood pressure reading of less than 120 over 80 is considered normal for adults. A blood pressure reading equal to or higher than 140 over 90 is high. Blood pressure between 120–139/80–89 is considered “prehypertension” and requires lifestyle modifications to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.



Having hypertension does not mean that you're tense, nervous or hyperactive. You can be calm and relaxed and still have high blood pressure. You usually can't tell if you have it. The only way to know if your blood pressure is high is to have it checked regularly by your doctor.

Who is at higher risk?

- People with a family history of high blood pressure
- African Americans
- People 35 years or older
- People who are overweight or obese
- People who smoke
- People who eat too much salt
- People who drink too much alcohol
- Women who use birth control pills
- People who aren't physically active
- Pregnant women

What should I do to control high blood pressure?

Even if you have had a prior stroke or heart attack, controlling high blood pressure can help prevent another one. Take these steps:

- Lose weight if you're overweight.
- Eat a healthy diet that's low in salt, saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol.
- Eat fruits and vegetables, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products.
- Enjoy regular physical activity.
- Limit alcohol to no more than two drinks a day if you're a man and one drink a day if you're a woman. Check with your doctor about drinking alcohol; it can raise blood pressure.
- Take medicine as prescribed.
- Know what your blood pressure should be and try to keep it at that level.

How can I learn more?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse or other healthcare professionals. Ask about other stroke topics. This is one of many *Let's Talk About Stroke* fact sheets.
- For more information about stroke, or to get more fact sheets, call the American Stroke Association at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit us online at StrokeAssociation.org.
- If you or someone you know has had a stroke, call the American Stroke Association's "Warmline" at 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) and:
 - ✓ Speak with other stroke survivors and caregivers trained to answer your questions and offer support.
 - ✓ Get information on stroke support groups in your area.
 - ✓ Sign up to get *Stroke Connection*, a free magazine for stroke survivors and caregivers.

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider:

Will I always have to take my medicine?

How often should my blood pressure be checked?

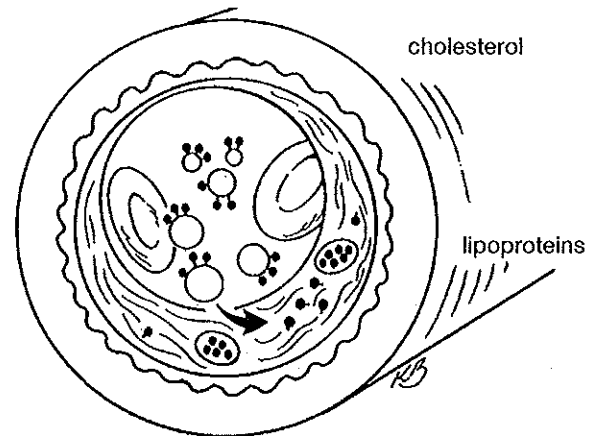
What should my blood pressure be?

What Are High Blood Cholesterol and Triglycerides?

What is high blood cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a soft, fat-like substance found in the bloodstream and in all your body's cells. Your body makes all the cholesterol it needs.

The saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol you eat may raise your blood cholesterol level. Having too much cholesterol in your blood may lead to increased risk for heart disease and stroke. About half of American adults have levels that are too high (200 mg/dL or higher) and about 1 in 5 has a level in the high-risk zone (240 mg/dL or higher). The good news is that you can take steps to control your cholesterol.



Cholesterol travels to the body's cells through the bloodstream by way of lipoproteins.

What's so bad about it?

Cholesterol and other fats can't dissolve in your blood. To travel to your cells, they use special carriers called lipoproteins. Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol is often called "the bad kind." When you have too much LDL cholesterol in your blood, it can join with fats and other substances to build up in the inner walls of your arteries. The arteries can become clogged and narrow, and blood flow is reduced. If this buildup of plaque ruptures, a blood clot may form at this location or a piece may break off and travel

in the bloodstream. If a blood clot blocks the blood flow to your heart, it causes a heart attack. If a blood clot blocks an artery leading to or in the brain, a stroke results.

A "good kind" of cholesterol, on the other hand, is called high-density lipoprotein (HDL). It carries harmful cholesterol away from the arteries and helps protect you from heart attack and stroke. It's better to have a lot of HDL cholesterol in your blood.

How can I lower the bad cholesterol in my blood?

- Cut down on foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol. These include fatty meats, butter, cheese, whole-milk dairy products, egg yolks, shellfish, other fish, organ meats, poultry and solid fats (foods from animals).
- Do physical activities at least 30 minutes on most or all days of the week.
- Eat more foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol, and high in fiber. These include fruits and vegetables, whole grains and grain products, beans and peas, fat-free and low-fat milk products, lean meats and poultry without skin, fatty fish, and nuts and seeds in limited amounts.
- Lose weight if you need to.
- Ask your doctor about medicines that can reduce cholesterol (not recommended for all patients).

What are triglycerides?

Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in your body. They're also a major energy source. They come from food, and your body also makes

them. High levels of blood triglycerides are often found in people who have high cholesterol levels, heart problems, are overweight or have diabetes.

What about fats?

There are different kinds of fats in the foods we eat. Saturated fat is the kind that raises blood cholesterol, so it's not good for you. Avoid animal fats like lard and meat fat, and some plant fats like coconut oil, palm oil and palm kernel oil.

Trans fat comes from adding hydrogen to vegetable oils and tends to raise blood cholesterol. It's used in commercial baked goods and for cooking in most restaurants and fast-food chains. It's also in milk and beef.

Polyunsaturated fats are found in vegetable oils and fish oils. These tend to lower blood cholesterol when consumed in moderation and used to replace saturated or trans fats in the diet.

Monounsaturated fats are found in olive, canola, peanut, sunflower and safflower oils. In a low-saturated-fat diet, they may lower blood cholesterol.

How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about heart disease.

3. For information on stroke, call 1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653) or visit StrokeAssociation.org.

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Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

Will I need cholesterol-lowering medicine?

How does exercise affect my levels?

What Are the Warning Signs of Heart Attack?

Heart and blood vessel disease is our nation's No. 1 killer. About half of the deaths from heart and blood vessel disease are from coronary heart disease, which includes heart attack.

About 325,000 people a year die of coronary attack before they get to a hospital or in the emergency room. But many of those deaths can be prevented — by acting fast!

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense. But most start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Here are some of the signs that can mean a heart attack is happening:



Chest discomfort. Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.



Discomfort in other areas of the upper body. Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.



Shortness of breath. This may occur with or without chest discomfort. **Other signs.** These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

What should I do if I suspect a heart attack?

- Don't wait more than five minutes before calling for help. Call 9-1-1 or the local emergency medical services (EMS) such as the fire department or ambulance.

Get to a hospital right away.

- If you're the one having symptoms, and you can't access the EMS, have someone drive you to the hospital right away. Don't drive yourself, unless you have absolutely no other option.

What else can I do?

- If you're properly trained and it's necessary, you can give CPR (mouth-to-mouth rescue breathing and chest compressions) to a victim until help arrives.
- Before there's an emergency, it's a good idea to find out which hospitals in your area have 24-hour emergency cardiac care. Also, keep a list of emergency phone numbers next to your phone and with you at all times, just in case. Take these steps NOW.

Why don't people act fast enough?

Half of all people having a heart attack wait more than two hours before getting help.

Some people feel it would be embarrassing to have a "false alarm." Others are so afraid of having a heart attack that they tell themselves

they aren't having one. These feelings are easy to understand, but they're also very dangerous.

If you or someone close to you shows signs of a heart attack, call 9-1-1 and get help right away!

How can I help to avoid a heart attack?

- Don't smoke, and avoid other people's tobacco smoke.
- Treat high blood pressure if you have it.
- Eat foods that are low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol and salt.
- Be physically active.
- Keep your weight under control.
- Get regular medical check-ups.
- Take medicine as prescribed.
- Control your blood sugar if you have diabetes.

How can I learn more?

1. Talk to your doctor, nurse or other health-care professionals. If you have heart disease or have had a stroke, members of your family also may be at higher risk. It's very important for them to make changes now to lower their risk.
2. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit americanheart.org to learn more about heart disease.
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Do you have questions or comments for your doctor?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider. For example:

How can I tell a heart attack from angina?

How is heart attack different from stroke?