

STROKE IN A



# The Top 10 Risk Factors for Stroke, and How to Manage Them

**Blood Pressure: Hypertension is the number 1 risk factor for stroke.** Normal blood pressure should be less than 120/80. You might not 'feel' high blood pressure, but there can be serious effects if it remains consistently high. Talk to your doctor about the right medications for you. It may take more than one to adequately control your high blood pressure.

- √ Check BP regularly, at least every 2 years
- √ Take medication as prescribed
- √ Eat a healthy diet
- √ Consume alcohol in moderation
- √ Reduce your stress

**Cholesterol: Dyslipidemia**, known as 'high cholesterol', may also cause a stroke. Cholesterol deposits build up inside arteries, blocking them and causing increased blood pressure and other problems. Regular blood levels of **Low Density Lipoprotein** (LDL; aka "Lousy" cholesterol) should be less than 2, **High Density Lipoprotein** (HDL; aka "Healthy cholesterol) greater than 1.3 for women and greater than or equal to 1.0 for men, **Total Cholesterol to HDL** ratio of less than 4 and **Triglycerides**, another common fatty acid, less than 1.5.

- √ See your GP for regular bloodwork
- √ Eat a healthy diet
- √ Exercise regularly
- √ Moderate alcohol consumption
- √ Take your medication as prescribed

**Diabetes:**

Poorly controlled diabetes damages the small blood vessels in your brain. Normal fasting blood sugar should be between 4 and 7. Serum Hgb A1C, a good indicator of how well you are managing your blood sugar, should be less than or equal to 7.

- √ Eat a healthy diet of whole grains, fresh produce and lean protein
- √ Exercise regularly
- √ Check your blood sugar and take your medication as prescribed

**Atrial Fibrillation:** In atrial fibrillation, the heart's upper chambers (the 'atria') quiver instead of beating effectively, causing blood pooling and clots.

- √ Take your blood thinner as prescribed
- √ Have frequent bloodwork done
- √ See your doctor regularly

**Tobacco Use:** Tobacco damages blood vessels. Stop smoking to reduce your risk of stroke by half after 2 years of being smoke-free.

- √ Find a smoking cessation program that is right for you

**Diet:** Keep your total daily sodium intake to less than 1500 mg. Read food labels when purchasing processed food. Don't add salt to food. Use other flavor-enhancers, like herbs and spices. Eat a varied diet of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean meats.

- ✓ Balance calories with exercise
- ✓ Take in less than 1500 mg of sodium daily
- ✓ Make healthy choices when eating
- ✓ Shop the perimeter of the store, where the fresh groceries are
- ✓

**Alcohol:** Heavy alcohol use increases your risk of stroke through a number of mechanisms. Drink in moderation – less than 14 drinks per week for men, and less than 9 drinks per week for women.

- ✓ Alcohol in moderation
- ✓ Avoid binge drinking

**Obesity:** Extra weight, especially around the middle, increases your risk of stroke and heart attack. A healthy waist circumference is 102 centimeters (40 inches) or less for men, and 88 cm. (35 in.) or less for women. Talk to a dietician or other healthcare professional about a diet and exercise plan to help you control your weight.

- ✓ Maintain a health weight
- ✓ Balance a healthy diet with exercise
- ✓ Ask a dietician, especially if you have special considerations like diabetes or high cholesterol

**Physical Activity:** Being physically-active reduces your risk of heart attack and stroke, makes your heart stronger, helps control your weight and blood pressure, and can even improve your mood.

- ✓ Check with your doctor before starting
- ✓ 105 minutes of moderate exercise / week
- ✓ Try a variety of activities
- ✓ Look for small chances to be active

**Metabolic Syndrome:** A group of risk factors which increases your risk for stroke. If you have at least 3 of the 5 listed conditions, you have metabolic syndrome, and are at increased risk for stroke and heart disease: abdominal obesity, high triglycerides (or are taking medication for same), low HDL, hypertension (or are taking anti-hypertensive medication), high blood sugar (or are taking diabetic medication).

- ✓ Make healthy lifestyle changes, as listed above!

For more information on stroke, or on managing risk factors for stroke and other cardiovascular diseases:



**It's all about your health!**

- ♥ Ask your OH&S practitioner.
- ♥ Talk to your family doctor. Find one if you need one: <http://www.cpsa.ab.ca/PhysicianSearch/AdvancedSearch.aspx>
- ♥ Contact the Stroke Program, Edmonton Area (780.407.3041).
- ♥ Call the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Alberta (780.451.4545) or visit their website: [www.heartandstroke.ab.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ab.ca)