

Stroke

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel is either blocked by a clot or bursts — preventing oxygen and nutrients from reaching part of the brain. Cells in this area begin to die and functions controlled by this part of the brain are lost. A stroke can affect your memory and emotions as well as your ability to walk, talk and/or understand. African Americans are at particularly high risk for heart disease and stroke: almost twice the risk of first-ever strokes and higher death rates compared to whites.

Types of Stroke

The two main types of stroke are ischemic and hemorrhagic.

- **Ischemic strokes** are the most common type. They're caused when blood vessels leading to the brain become blocked, preventing oxygen from reaching the brain. **Transient ischemic attacks (TIAs)** are minor or warning strokes. In a TIA, the blood clot occurs for a short time and resolves itself. Although TIAs are temporary, they're strong indicators of a possible major stroke.
- **Hemorrhagic strokes** occur when blood vessels in or around the brain break.

Know Your Risk

Traits or behaviors that increase your risk for heart disease and stroke are called risk factors. Know your risk factors by knowing your numbers. Become aware of your cholesterol and blood pressure levels and your weight. Several factors increase your risk for heart disease and stroke. You can't change some, such as family history, age and gender. But some risk factors can be changed or treated. The six major changeable risk factors are:

- Smoking
 - Smoking cigarettes puts you at much greater risk for having a stroke.
- High cholesterol
 - A high level of total cholesterol in the blood is a major risk factor for heart disease, which raises your risk of stroke.
- High blood pressure
 - The prevalence of high blood pressure in African Americans in the United States is the highest in the world.
 - Have your blood pressure checked at least once every two years and more often if you have a family history of high blood pressure, stroke or heart attack.
- Diabetes
 - About 2.7 million African Americans, or over 11 percent, have diabetes.
- Physical activity
 - Regular physical activity helps reduce your risk of heart attack, heart disease and stroke.
- Overweight
 - Being inactive, obese or both can increase your risk of high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

Know Your Warning Signs

In the past, doctors couldn't do much to help stroke victims. Now, stroke doesn't have to lead to disability or death. The key is to recognize a stroke and to call 9-1-1 immediately. Know these warning signs of stroke and teach them to others.

- Numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Confusion
- Trouble speaking or understanding
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Difficulty walking
- Dizziness
- Loss of balance or coordination
- Severe headache with no known cause



Diagnosing Stroke

To diagnose a stroke, your doctor will gather information and perform various tests.

- Gather personal and family medical history
- Physical and neurological examination
- Blood tests
- CT or MRI scan
- Other diagnostic tests

Treating Stroke

Ischemic Stroke —

Treatment after stroke:

- Doctors remove the blockage to restore blood flow to the brain.
- tPA (tissue plasminogen activator) is a drug that can be administered within a three-hour period from the onset of the stroke to dissolve the blood clot. If given promptly by medical personnel, tPA can significantly reduce the effects of stroke, including reducing permanent disability.

Preventative Treatment:

- Antiplatelet agents such as aspirin and anticoagulants such as warfarin can help avoid blood clots.
- Carotid endarterectomy is a surgical procedure to remove blood vessel blockage from the carotid artery.
- Balloon angioplasty and implantable stents can treat cardiovascular disease and reduce build-up clogging a blood vessel.



Hemorrhagic Stroke —

- Surgical treatment is often recommended to prevent further rupture and bleeding.

Effects of Stroke

The effects of a stroke depend on the location of the damaged site and the extent of brain tissue affected.

Damage on the **right side** of the brain could produce any or all of the following:

- Vision problems
- Quick and inquisitive behavioral style
- Memory loss
- Loss of movement and/or control of the left side of the body

Damage on the **left side** of the brain could produce any or all of the following:

- Speech/ language problems
- Perception problems (misjudging how far or close something appears)
- Slow, cautious behavioral style
- Memory loss
- Loss of movement and/or control of the right side of the body
- Perception problems (misjudging how far or close something appears)