VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

SARGE Book

Stroke Awareness Resource Guide Essentials

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Acknowledgements

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Stroke Awareness Resource Guide Essentials

What is a Stroke?

A Stroke is a Medical Emergency Call 911 Immediately

A stroke is the result of brain tissue not getting enough blood flow. The brain needs a constant supply of blood, which carries oxygen and nutrients it needs to function properly. Blood vessels, known as arteries, carry blood that contains oxygen from the heart to the brain. When one of these arteries in the brain is either blocked by a blood clot or bursts, it disrupts blood flow to the rest of the brain, causing a stroke. Once the blood flow is disrupted, the rest of the brain cannot get the oxygen it needs, brain cells start to die, and the stroke symptoms begin. Once brain cells die, they cannot be revived.

When someone has symptoms of a stroke it's important to Call 911 Immediately, because time is brain.

Symptoms of a Stroke

It is important to know that stroke symptoms come on suddenly. Remember time is brain, so "B.E.F.A.S.T." when stroke symptoms occur. Use the letters in B.E.F.A.S.T. to spot a stroke.

If any of these symptoms start suddenly, remember to "B.E.F.A.S.T." and call 911 immediately to seek medical help.

NOTE THE TIME WHEN ANY SYMPTOMS FIRST APPEAR. There are treatments that can reduce disability from stroke. These treatments work better the sooner treatment is received. Do not delay getting help. Medical options exist that may reduce the long-term effects of a stroke if received soon after the beginning of a stroke.

STROKE IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY. CALL 911!

Stroke symptoms are always sudden. B.E.F.A.S.T. symptoms are the same for men and women, but women may also experience other subtle stroke warning signs such as **confusion or memory problems, fatigue, and generalized weakness.**

Types of Stroke

Ischemic Stroke

Ischemic strokes are the most common type of stroke. An ischemic stroke occurs when an artery in the brain is blocked, causing brain cells to not get enough oxygen and die. There are two types of ischemic strokes known as embolic and thrombotic strokes.

Embolic Stroke

An embolic stroke happens when a blood clot or plaque fragment breaks off, usually from the heart or the large arteries connected to the brain and then travels to the brain. Once it reaches the brain, it blocks a blood vessel and causes a stroke.

Thrombotic Stroke

A thrombotic stroke happens when a blood clot forms inside an artery in the brain. The clot blocks the blood flow and stops oxygen from getting to that part of the brain, which causes a stroke.

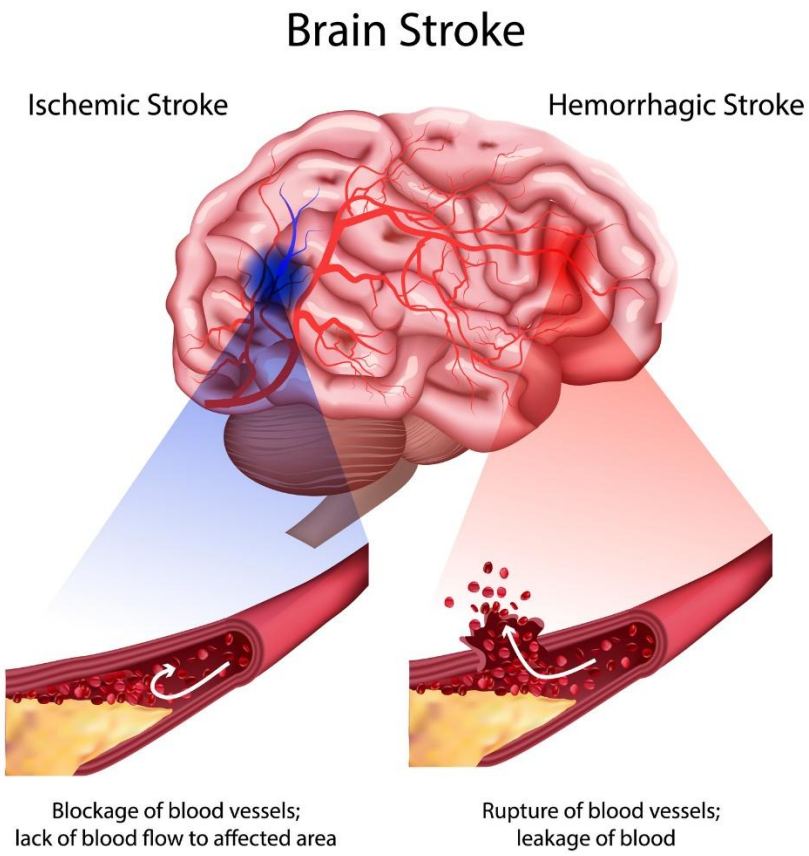
Medication treatment options after an ischemic stroke

Antiplatelet

An antiplatelet is a medicine that stops platelets or little particles in the blood from clumping together and forming a clot. Dual antiplatelet therapy (DAPT) is when two antiplatelet medications are used together to lower the chance of another blood clot forming and causing a stroke.

DOACs

Another treatment option is direct oral anticoagulants (DOACs). DOACs are a type of anticoagulant or blood thinner medicine that doesn't require regular blood testing or a special diet. They start working quickly, leave the body faster, and usually *have fewer drug interactions with other medications* than traditional blood thinners. They also help lower the chance of a brain bleed when taken for stroke prevention.

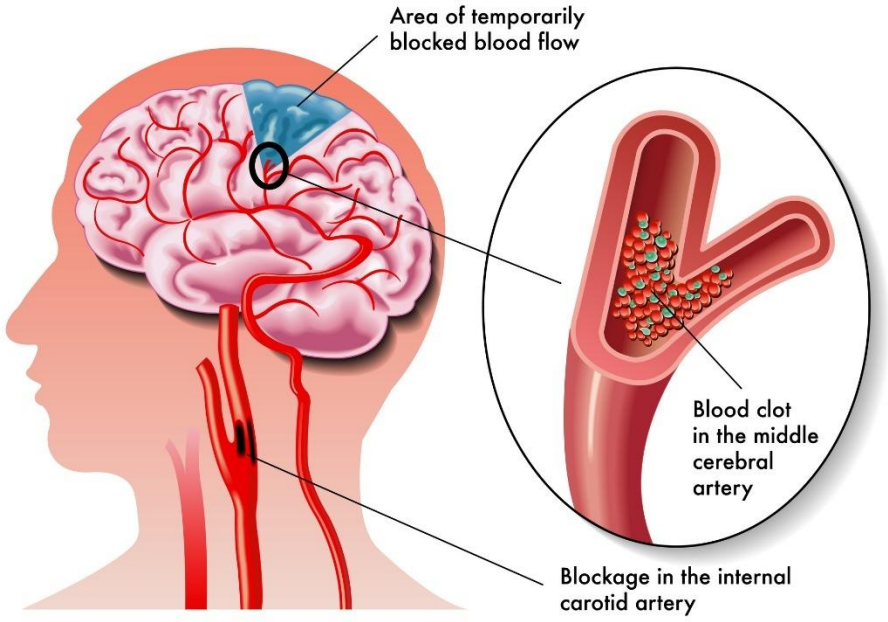


Hemorrhagic Stroke

A hemorrhagic stroke, also called a bleeding stroke, happens when a blood vessel in the brain bursts and spills into and around the brain. High blood pressure and aneurysms can make the blood vessels in the brain weak. Over time, these weakened blood vessels can break open, leak blood into the brain, which damages brain cells and stops that part of the brain from working properly. The most common cause of this type of stroke is uncontrolled high blood pressure. There are different types of bleeding strokes depending on which part of the brain they happen in.

Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)

A transient ischemic attack or TIA is also called a mini stroke. It happens when blood flow to the brain is blocked or partially blocked for a short period of time. The blood flow usually returns once the blockage clears, and the symptoms go away. A TIA or mini stroke is a warning sign that a bigger stroke could happen in the future and should be taken seriously. If you have symptoms of a TIA, go to the hospital right away because a major stroke can happen after a TIA.



Major symptoms of a TIA include sudden:

- Numbness, weakness, or paralysis of the face, arm, or leg, usually on one side of the body.
- Loss of vision in one or both eyes or double vision.
- Trouble speaking or difficulty understanding others.
- Loss of balance or coordination.
- Severe headache with no known cause.

Personal Risk Factors

LOWER YOUR RISK!

Strokes are preventable. For this reason, it is important to know your personal risk factors for stroke. There are two types of risk factors for strokes that include factors that you **cannot change** and those **you can change.**

Uncontrollable Risk Factors – Things You Cannot Change

Having uncontrollable risk factors means that there are some things that are outside of your control that put you at risk for a stroke, like your age, birth sex, and race.

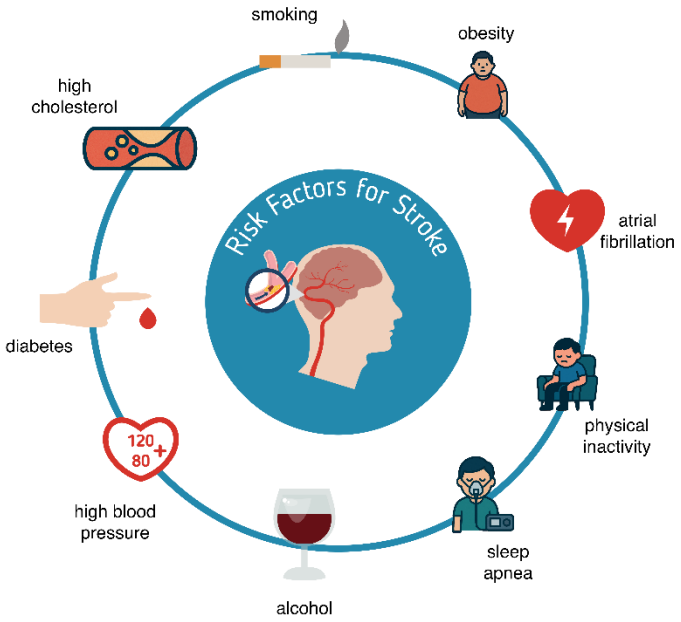
Identify Your **Uncontrollable** Risk Factors

- **Increasing Age** - The chances of having a stroke increase with age. Two-thirds of all strokes happen to people over age 65.
- **Gender or Birth Sex** - Women have a higher lifetime risk of stroke than men. Pregnancy, certain forms of birth control, history of preeclampsia/eclampsia, or gestational diabetes, and certain types of hormone therapy are special stroke risks for women.
- **Race** – Studies show that African American and Hispanic communities have a higher chance of having a stroke because they often have high blood pressure, a leading risk factor for stroke.
- **Family History** - If you have a family member who has had a stroke, TIA, diabetes, or sickle cell anemia, you have a higher stroke risk.
- **Personal History**– If you have had a stroke or a TIA, or have carotid or heart disease, you have a higher chance of having another stroke in the next five years if you do not make changes to your lifestyle. There are medications to reduce your risk of a second stroke if you have any of these conditions.
- **Carotid or Other Artery Disease**. Large arteries carrying blood to the brain can become damaged or blocked by fatty plaque buildup. This can limit or stop blood flow to the brain and cause a stroke.
- One or more of these risk factors means your risk of having a stroke is higher.

Remember, 80% of all strokes are preventable.

Controllable Risk Factors, Things You Can Change

Having controllable risk factors means you can take actions to eliminate or reduce the risk of having a stroke. For example, taking blood pressure medication as prescribed to manage blood pressure or starting an exercise program to increase movement are actions that can be taken to control some of these risk factors. The point is to take control of the things that can be controlled.



Identify Your **Controllable** Risk Factors

High Blood Pressure – This is the biggest risk factor for strokes that you can control because high blood pressure is the leading cause of stroke. Many times, there are no symptoms. If your blood pressure is mostly above 120/80, you have high blood pressure.

- Take your medications as prescribed by your healthcare provider. This means taking the correct dosage at the right times.
- Eat less salt and get regular exercise.
- Keep track of blood pressure readings at home no matter how you feel because high blood pressure usually does not have symptoms. Report your blood pressure readings to your doctor.

Diabetes - People with diabetes are more likely to have a stroke. High blood sugar damages blood vessels in the brain and throughout the body. Many people with diabetes are also overweight and have high blood pressure and high cholesterol, which makes the risk even higher.

- Monitor your blood sugar at least once a day.
- Take medications as prescribed.
- Eat the right foods (low-glycemic foods) and get regular exercise.
- Make sure to get the HbA1c lab test at least twice a year, that measures your average blood glucose control.

High Cholesterol - Cholesterol is the fat-like substance in your blood that can build up and block arteries. If it blocks blood flow to the brain, it can cause a stroke.

- Try to avoid fried or fatty foods. Limit foods high in saturated and trans fats.
- Eat lean meats, fruits, and vegetables. Eat a variety of whole grains and low-fat milk products.
- Take any medications prescribed to you.

Smoking or Vaping – Smoking damages blood vessels, makes your arteries clog faster, raises your blood pressure, and makes your heart work harder to pump your blood. Nicotine is found in cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and e-cigarettes or vapes. 58.8% of stroke survivors in the US have a history of smoking.

- You may request medication that can help you quit smoking.
- Enroll in smoking cessation classes to help you quit.

Physical Inactivity – Being less active is associated with an increased risk of stroke and heart disease. Being more active lowers your risk of stroke and helps with other health problems like high blood pressure and diabetes.

- Slowly increase your physical activity by doing activities you enjoy.
- Talk to your health care provider about starting an exercise program that includes increasing daily steps and movement throughout the day.

Obesity – Being overweight, especially around your belly, puts extra strain on your heart and blood vessels. People who are obese tend to have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and high blood sugar levels that can lead to diabetes. Losing just 5-10 pounds can greatly lower your stroke risk.

- Follow a healthy diet. Try to avoid fried foods and limit sweets.
- Meet with a registered dietitian to help you set up a diet plan to lose weight.

Atrial Fibrillation – This is when your heart beats in an irregular rhythm. This can cause blood to pool in the bottom part of the heart, where clots can form. These clots can travel to the brain and cause a stroke.

- Take blood-thinning medications as directed.
- Keep appointments to have your labs checked to monitor the effect of blood-thinning medications.
- Get regular physical activity, eat a heart-healthy diet, manage high blood pressure, avoid smoking, limit caffeine and alcohol, and maintain a healthy weight.

Alcohol – Drinking more than two drinks a day can double your chance of having a stroke. Alcohol can also affect the medicines you're taking and make them less effective. Standard drink volumes are: one shot of liquor (1.5 oz), ½ cup of wine (5 oz), or 1 serving of beer (12 oz).

- Ask your health care provider if alcohol will interact with any of your medications.
- If you are a man, limit alcohol intake to 2 drinks or less per day. If you are a woman, limit alcohol intake to 1 drink or less per day.

Sleep Apnea – This is a breathing disorder where you stop breathing multiple times during the night. It causes you to have low oxygen levels while you sleep, increases blood pressure, and makes it more likely for you to develop atrial fibrillation – all of these can increase your risk of having a stroke.

- Use your CPAP every night.
- Talk to your health care provider if you are having any problems with your CPAP or if the mask is not comfortable.
- There are other options if your CPAP is not working for you. **Don't give up**!

It is important to follow up with Your Healthcare Provider When You Have Questions - Keep all your appointments. Ask questions. Write questions down to ask at your appointment. Keep records of your blood pressure and blood sugar readings and bring them to your appointments.

Managing your controllable risk factors requires action on your part. It will take practice and time develop your new skills. A good place to start is to make a plan that works for you and what your body needs.

If you don't know where to start, pick something *you* want to do and something you feel that you could accomplish. Some examples are listed below:

- Be physically active
- Take your prescribed medications every day.
- Cut down on tobacco use.
- Make healthy food choices.
- Lower the stress in your life.

Importance of Medication Compliance

Taking your medicine lowers your risk for another stroke, a heart attack, or damage to your kidneys. Medicine works best when taken the way your provider has advised you to take it. Remember to be ***right*** when taking medicine.

- The ***right*** medicine,
- The ***right*** amount,
- The ***right*** time of day.

It is important to take your medicine every day. Your provider will prescribe the medicines that are best for you. NEVER just STOP or CHANGE your medications without talking to your provider first. Below are a few different types of medicines that help prevent strokes. Check with your provider to see if you are on these types of medicines.

Medicine	What it does	Possible side effects
Blood thinners:	Prevents blood clots from forming.	Bleeding of your gums, bruising, rash, or stomach pains.
Direct-Acting Oral Anticoagulants (DOACs):	Keep blood clots from forming in an artery.	Increased risk for bleeding and bruising.
Dual Antiplatelet Therapy (DAPT):	Stop platelets from clumping together to form blood clots	Increased risk for bleeding and bruising.
Statins:	Helps to lower your cholesterol.	Muscle pain, soreness, weakness (with fever, tiredness), stomach upset, abdominal pain, or constipation.
ACE Inhibitors:	Stops a chemical that makes your blood vessels smaller	Swelling of your lips, dry cough, or rash.
Antiarrythmic:	Ensures your heart beats at a normal rhythm.	Positional low blood pressure, low heart rate, dizziness.

Blood Pressure

Your heart pumps blood around your body. Blood pressure (BP) is the force of pressure of your blood against the walls of your arteries. When your heart squeezes to pump blood into the arteries, it creates a systolic pressure or top number of your blood pressure reading. When your heart relaxes, it expands and fills with blood, creating a diastolic pressure or bottom number of your blood pressure reading. When the top number is less than 120 and the bottom number is less than 80, your BP is normal. Checking your BP often will help you know if it is normal. Your blood pressure can change throughout the day, so try to take it around the same time every day. It is important to monitor your blood pressure regularly because high blood pressure usually has no symptoms.

You can take charge of your BP!

Ask your provider what blood pressure range is BEST for you.

My BP should be from: _____ to: _____

- ✓ Check your BP at least once a day.
- ✓ Check your BP at the drugstore or at home if you have a BP machine.
- ✓ Check your BP at the same time of day and at the same location.
- ✓ Record your BP to share with your doctor.
- ✓ Ask your provider about getting a blood pressure monitor ordered.
- ✓ Call your provider if your BP is higher than it should be (see above).

Healthy Diet

Why it is important to change the way you eat.

Healthy food habits will reduce your risk of stroke. Small changes can make a big difference. Every step you take towards a healthier diet is a step in the right direction to take charge of your stroke risk factors. Nutrition impacts blood pressure, weight, cholesterol, and diabetes – all of which affect your risk for stroke. When you make healthy food choices, your cholesterol levels, blood sugar, and blood pressure will improve. You can do it!

Too much salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats can damage your blood vessels. Fresh fruits, veggies, and whole grains build them back up strong.

Mediterranean Diet

What is the Mediterranean Diet?

"Mediterranean diet" is a name for the traditional eating habits in the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

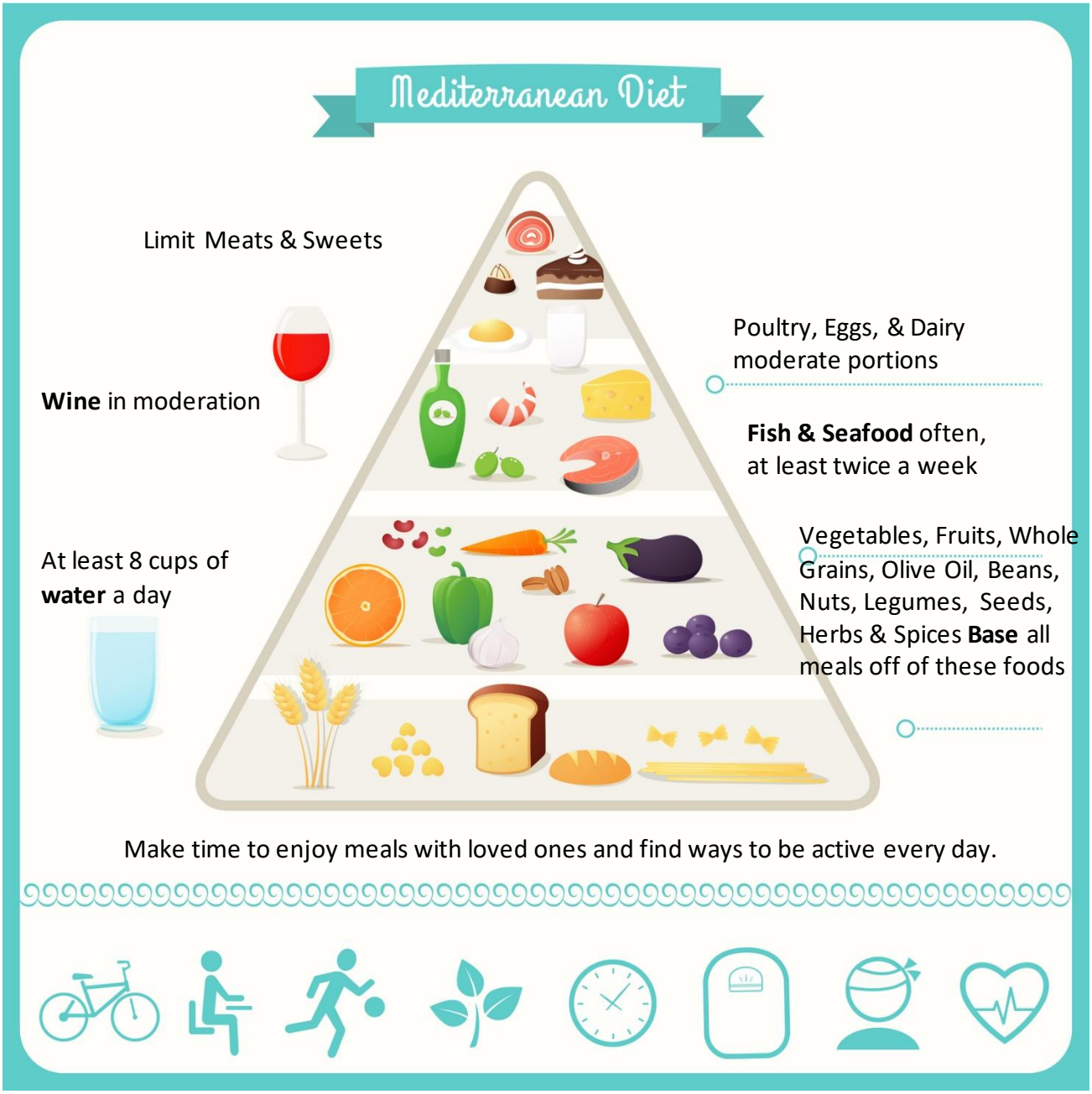
A Mediterranean-style diet typically includes:

- Plenty of fruits, vegetables, bread and other grains, potatoes, beans, nuts, and seeds.
- Olive oil as a primary fat source.
- Dairy products, eggs, fish, and poultry in low to moderate amounts.

The diet includes more fish and chicken than red meat. It focuses on food that comes from plants and isn't highly processed. Wine may be consumed in low to moderate amounts, usually with meals. Fruit is a common dessert instead of candy or sweets.

- **Emphasizes** vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, and lentils.
- **Includes** low-fat or fat-free dairy products, fish, poultry (chicken, turkey, etc.), healthy vegetable oils (olive oil, avocado oil, vegetable oil, peanut oil, etc.), and nuts.
- **Limits** added sugars, sugary drinks, salty foods, highly processed foods, white bread or pasta, unhealthy fats, and fatty or processed meat.
- **Limit Caffeine** - Caffeine increases your heart rate and can increase your blood pressure. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, chocolate, and some sodas.

Sometimes when you are hungry, it may be your body wanting something to drink. Try having a glass of water first



Eating this way can help prevent heart disease and strokes. It can also help control some risk factors such as obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. There is some evidence that a Mediterranean diet rich in virgin olive oil may help the body get rid of extra cholesterol from arteries and help keep blood flowing well.

High Cholesterol

What to eat if you have high cholesterol

Fat should only make up about 25% to 35% of the total calories you eat in a day. Some fats, like saturated and trans fats, can raise the "bad" cholesterol in your blood. It's best to eat as little of those fats as possible.

Saturated fat can be found in fatty meats, whole milk, butter, cream, and other dairy foods made with whole milk. It is also found in palm kernel oil and coconut oil. These oils are often used in food processing.

Trans fat is found in foods made with hydrogenated oils. It can be in fried foods, snack foods, and things made with shortening, stick margarine, or lard.

You should only eat about 200mg of total cholesterol per day. The foods with the most cholesterol include egg yolks, fatty meats, shrimp, and dairy foods made from whole milk.

Choose heart-healthy fats like mono and polyunsaturated fats. Oils like soybean, canola, olive, or sunflower oil are good choices. Stay away from fats that turn solid at room temperature, such as lard.

Eat cold-water fatty fish twice a week that have healthy fats called omega-3s. Pick fresh or frozen fish, or canned fish that's low in salt. Good choices are salmon, tuna (packed in water), mackerel, and sardines.

Food Ideas		
Category	**Try this**	**Instead of this**
Meats or other proteins	Fish (canned or fresh) Chicken or turkey (skinless) Game meat Tofu, beans One egg or two egg whites	Beef & other red meats Hot dogs Processed lunch meats
Grains	Whole grain bread, Brown rice Whole grain pasta, Whole grain noodles	White bread White rice Regular pasta or noodles
Dairy and Fats	1% or skim milk Low fat cheese Low fat or fat free yogurt Olive oil, canola oil, soybean oil Low fat mayonnaise	Whole milk Regular cheese, mayonnaise Ice cream Butter
Sweets and Snacks	Water or diet soda Nuts, seeds, air popped popcorn Fresh fruit, whole grain raisin bread	Regular soda, Chips Other salty snacks Donuts and croissants
Vegetables	Green beans, mustard greens, sweet potatoes, cabbage, broccoli, lettuce, carrots, tomatoes, squash	Its best to avoid pickles and sauerkraut as they are high in sodium
Fruits	Apples, peaches, bananas, plums, oranges, pears, grapes, cherries	Grapefruit interacts with many medications; check with your physician to ensure it is okay for you

Exercise…

Why is exercise important?

Exercise helps to keep your body and brain healthy. It is good for your heart and mind. It lowers your blood pressure and blood sugar and helps your blood circulate better. Exercise gives you more energy and strengthens your muscles and bones. It increases flexibility, stamina, and can help you feel less stressed and happier.

How much exercise do I need?

A little exercise goes a long way. You only need 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week. You can choose to break up the 30 minutes by exercising 10 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes after lunch, and 10 minutes after dinner and get the same benefits.

What type of exercise is best?

Regular exercise should include activities that improve your flexibility, strength, and endurance.

Flexibility means being able to move your body more easily. You can work on this with stretching or range of motion exercises.

Strength means your muscles are strong. You can build strength with muscle resistance exercises like lifting weights or using resistance bands.

Endurance means how long you can keep going without getting tired. You can improve this by doing things like walking, biking, or swimming for a longer time.

What is moderate activity?

It is important to exercise at the right intensity. Remember, *moderate activity* is the goal. Moderate activity means you will breathe a little faster but can still talk comfortably. For example, you should be able to say the "Pledge of Allegiance" without getting out of breath. *Hard activity* makes you breathe fast, and you can only say a few words at a time. *Light activity shouldn't change your breathing.*

Perceived Exertion Chart	
10	Very, Very Hard Activity Completely out of breath and can't talk
9	Very Hard Activity Breathing hard Can speak only one word
7-8	Hard Activity Breathing hard Can speak a few words
4-6	Moderate Activity Breathing faster than normal Can talk comfortably
2-3	Light Activity No change in breathing
1	No Activity

Sit and Stretch

Sitting in a chair is a great place to start!

- Place your feet on the floor, relax, and lean forward
- Stretch your back as you reach for your toes
- Lift your arms over your head and stretch up with your arms
- Lift your right arm up and slowly lean to the left
- Lift your left arm up and slowly lean to the right.
- Hold each stretch for 20 seconds.

Elastic Resistance Bands

Elastic resistance bands come in different colors and have different levels of resistance. There are many types of resistance bands on the market to choose from. Some have handles on the ends and others are just flat. You can buy resistance bands online or at stores that sell exercise equipment.

Here are some exercises to improve endurance.

Walking

Walking is one of the easiest ways to build endurance. It's great because you can do it at the gym, the mall, or just around your neighborhood. Start by walking at a comfortable pace. Each time you walk, try to go a little farther or a little longer. You can keep track of your progress by writing down your walks in a walking diary. When you first start a walking program, it is normal to feel a little

tired, but don't give up! Stick with it because after a few weeks of walking regularly, you will start to have more energy.

Pedal Exerciser

A pedal exerciser is another way to build endurance. It is a good choice if walking is hard for you because you can use it at home. It can be used to exercise your arms and legs. You can put a pedal exerciser on a table and pedal with your arms or use it on the floor and pedal with your legs.

Exercise Safely

When exercising, remember to be safe! Talk to your provider before starting an exercise program. Muscles take time to get stronger. If you do too much too quickly, your muscles will hurt. Start out slowly and increase your activity as you get stronger.

EXERCISING TIPS

- Wear loose-fitting clothes and comfortable shoes.
- Wait 90 minutes after meals before exercising.
- Do not exercise outdoors if the temperature is above 90° or below 40° F.

TO FIGHT FATIGUE

- Exercise when rested – in the morning or after a nap.
- Spread out your activities throughout the day.
- Allow time to rest after exercise.
- Plan your day and take time to rest.

STOP EXERCISING RIGHT AWAY IF YOU HAVE:

- Pain, pressure, or heaviness in your chest, jaw, neck, or arms
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Excessive shortness of breath or fatigue
- Nausea

IF YOU DO NOT FEEL BETTER AFTER A FEW MINUTES — CALL 911!

Common Personality and Emotional Changes after Stroke

When someone has a stroke, it can change how they feel, act, and think. This happens because the brain controls our emotions, behavior and thinking. It is common to experience these things after a stroke and it can affect each person differently. You may feel confused, anxious, irritable, disinterested, or make hasty decisions when that may not be normal for you. The changes you experience will depend on which area of your brain was damaged with the stroke.

Types of Personality Changes

- **Pseudobulbar Affect (PBA)**: This causes people to cry or laugh suddenly when it doesn't match how they really feel. It can happen at the wrong time, like in public or during serious moments.
- **Depression**: Feeling very sad, tired, or not interested in things people previously liked to do. More about this in the section below!
- **Fatigue**: Stroke survivors can feel very tired, even after doing things like thinking or reading. This is very common and can happen any time after the stroke. Some people feel fatigue for a long time but usually find ways to make the most of the energy they have.
- **Anxiety**: feeling very worried or scared all the time, even when there's no real danger.
- **Anger, Irritability and Aggression**: people may get angry or lose their tempers more easily than before their stroke.
- **Impulsiveness**: This means doing things too quickly without thinking about the consequences. It's more common if the stroke affected the front or right side of your brain.
- **Confusion**: It can be harder to understand what's going on around you after a stroke. Too much noise or mess can make this worse. It can help if family or caregivers reduce clutter and distractions, and lower volume of TV or music.
- **Forgetfulness and Memory Loss**: Having a stroke can make it hard to remember things. It can affect two types of memory:
    - Verbal memory: remembering names, words, and stories
    - Visual memory: remembering faces, pictures, places or things they've seen
- **Apathy**: People may stop wanting to do things they used to enjoy or not feel motivated enough to do their daily activities. They may feel disinterested in life.

These changes can be tough for the person who had the stroke and also for their family and caregivers. It can also be hard for your healthcare provider to recognize right away. If you notice any of these, tell your healthcare provider.

Post Stroke Fatigue

Fatigue : About half of stroke survivors experience fatigue. Fatigue means they feel very tired and lack energy. This can happen any time after the stroke. Some people feel fatigue for a long time, but usually find ways to make the most of the energy they have. There are many factors that can help explain this lack of energy.

After a stroke, fatigue may be due to sleeping poorly, not eating enough nutrition, or side effects from new medications. Experiencing other emotional changes such as irritability, confusion, or forgetfulness can also be very draining. If you have difficulty concentrating and changes in memory, then it can take more focus and energy to get through your day. Depending on your stroke symptoms, you may have to work harder to do each task. Things like getting dressed, talking, and walking take more effort than they used to.

What can you do?

- Planning: Plan your day to balance rest and activity. Include recovery time after physical or cognitive exertion. Consider your energy levels when scheduling tasks or appointments.
- Pacing: Take regular breaks throughout the day. Break down larger tasks into smaller ones. Avoid overdoing it especially during rehab or therapy sessions.
- Prioritizing: List daily tasks and organize them by importance. Set realistic expectations and avoid overwhelming yourself.
- Nutrition: Eating balanced, healthy meals will help you maintain steady energy levels
- Sleep: Getting enough sleep restores energy and helps recovery. Building healthy sleep habits such as having a consistent bedtime and wake-up time, avoiding screen time before bed, and not eating too late can help you do that. You may need to take a nap during the day based on your energy levels.
- Exercise: Even though it seems counterintuitive, regular, low-impact exercise can actually help decrease fatigue. See the Exercise section for more information.

Post Stroke Depression

Depression: About 3 out of 10 people who have a stroke get depressed. This can happen right away or months or even years later. If it's not treated, it can get in the way of recovery and can affect quality of life. Post-stroke depression goes unnoticed and is under-diagnosed and under-treated.

Common Symptoms

- Feeling down
- Feeling really sad or not interested in things you used to like.
- Feeling tired all the time.
- Not wanting to do anything.
- Staying away from other people.
- Trouble focusing or remembering things.
- Difficulty having fun.
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Getting easily annoyed or upset.
- Eating a lot more or a lot less than usual.
- Feeling hopeless or worthless.
- Having body aches, pains, and digestive problems that won't go away.
- Thinking about hurting yourself or not wanting to live.

You may be at higher risk of post-stroke depression if you have had depression before, have a physical disability, had a more serious stroke, have a family history of psychiatric conditions, don't have family or friends around to help, or are a woman.

Your healthcare provider should evaluate you for depression during a follow-up visit. Be honest about how you feel and what you're experiencing. It can help to have a family member or caregiver

with you when you talk about this because they might notice things you don't. If you are diagnosed with post-stroke depression, your healthcare provider may recommend treatment.

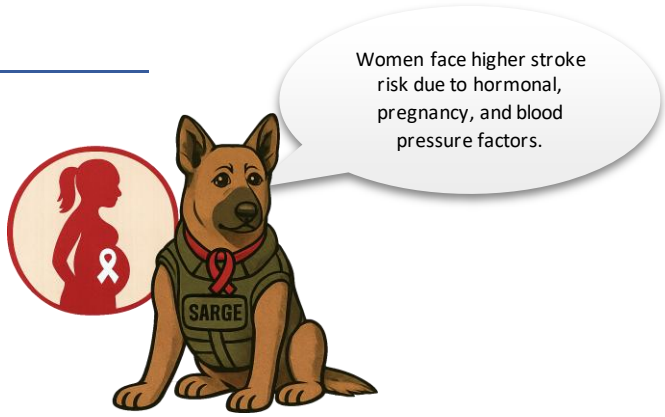
Treatment

- Medication such as antidepressants. It can take up to 4 to 6 weeks for these medications to start working.
- Therapy such has cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing and supportive psychosocial intervention may be helpful. You may be referred to a therapy program.
- Stroke support groups: Connecting with other stroke survivors can be helpful. You can also learn about resources and services in your community that can help make life easier after a stroke.
- Exercise program: Joining an exercise program can also help. A structured exercise program for at least 4 weeks alongside other treatments may also help you feel better and get stronger.

Women and Strokes

Women have a higher risk of stroke than men. One in five women will have a stroke. Stroke is the third leading cause of death in women, compared to the fifth leading cause of death in men.

Why are women at risk for stroke?



Birth control	Estrogen-containing birth control can increase stroke risk.
Hormone therapy	Can increase stroke risk, depending on the stage of menopause.
Menopause onset	Early-onset or premature menopause can increase stroke risk.
Pre-eclampsia	High blood pressure related to pregnancy increases stroke risk during pregnancy and doubles stroke risk later in life.
Pregnancy	Pregnant women have a higher risk of stroke compared to non-pregnant women, with the highest risk in the third trimester and postpartum.
Atrial fibrillation	An abnormal heart rhythm that can cause more serious and deadly strokes in women.
Diabetes	More strongly associated with stroke in women.
Hypertension	More strongly associated with stroke in women.
Migraine with aura	Affects more women and increases stroke risk, especially when combined with smoking.

- Discuss the risks and benefits of birth control or hormone therapy with your healthcare provider.
- Having a history of preeclampsia increases the risk of high blood pressure. Regularly monitoring blood pressure after pregnancy can assist with early detection and treatment.

Diabetes

As a diabetic, it is important to make smart food choices that will help your body manage sugar.

Try to limit:

- Carbohydrates (carbs) like white bread, white rice, and white potatoes. Think of the white carbs as sugar.
- Red meat
- Fats that are solid at room temperature
- It's important to choose to eat certain foods:

Pick 5 fruits and vegetables in a rainbow of colors every day!

Whole grain breads, brown rice, whole wheat pasta!

Low fat protein (chicken, fish, turkey)

Control your portion sizes and make healthy choices. Make a routine for yourself:

- Eat around the same time every day.
    - Early mealtimes allow your meals to digest. When you eat too late, your sugar level may be high in the morning. Take medications or insulin at about the same time every day.

You need to take responsibility for yourself!

Diabetes is your disease. You must take control of it and not let it take control of you.

- Eat 3 meals a day.
- Limit sweets and desserts.
- Eat high-fiber fruits and vegetables.
- Eat low-fat, healthy proteins.
- Eat small amounts of healthy fats (nuts, avocados)

Tobacco Cessation

Why is quitting smoking and vaping important?

- Nicotine is found in cigarettes, chewing tobacco, cigars, and e-cigarettes or vapes. Nicotine raises your blood pressure, speeds up your heart rate, and damages your arteries.
- Nicotine increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. Quitting smoking and vaping will greatly lower your risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Smoking cigarettes and being around secondhand smoke will also cause heart disease, lung disease, and cancer.

It is never too late to quit!

No matter how long you have smoked, when you quit smoking, your risk of heart disease and stroke goes down.

List your reasons to quit and read them several times a day.
As you keep reading your list of reasons, **add to it** if you can.
Wrap your cigarette pack with paper and rubber bands.
Avoid situations and "triggers" you relate to smoking.
Don't carry matches and keep your cigarette out of easy reach.
Don't buy a new pack until you finish the one you are smoking.
Change brands twice during the week; each time change to a brand **lower in tar and nicotine**.
Try to stop for 48 hours at one time.
Throw out all cigarettes and matches. Hide lighters and ashtrays.
Ask your provider about enrolling in a smoking cessation class.

Or Just DO IT – Go Cold Turkey – Quit Smoking Today!

The urge to smoke may come, but if you take charge, you can be smoke-free!

Set an *action plan* to decrease or stop smoking. Your provider can help. Here are some things your provider can do to help you quit.

- ☐ Refer you to a *smoking cessation clinic*.
- ☐ Prescribe nicotine replacement therapy – gum, patch, or spray.
- ☐ Prescribe smoking cessation medications.

Take Charge and set a quit date. **My quit date is** _____

Resources

1. Risk Factors
    a. Risk Factors for Stroke
    b. Stroke Prevention Brochure English ucm_463745
2. Types of Stroke
    a. Ischemic Stroke
        i. Your Risk for Stroke and How to Be Prepared
        ii. DS15794_LTAS_IschemicStroke
        iii. Cardiovascular Media Library, Watch-Learn-Live. (heart.org)
    b. Embolic Stroke
        i. Cardiovascular Media Library, Watch-Learn-Live. (heart.org)
        ii. DOACs
            1. Let's Talk About Anticoagulants and Antiplatelet Agents
            2. What are DOACS? (heart.org)
    c. Thrombotic Stroke
        i. DAPT
            1. Let's Talk About Anticoagulants and Antiplatelet Agents
            2. What is DAPT (heart.org)
    d. Hemorrhagic Stroke
        i. Let's Talk About Hemorrhagic Stroke
        ii. Cardiovascular Media Library, Watch-Learn-Live. (heart.org)
    e. Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)
        i. Cardiovascular Media Library, Watch-Learn-Live (heart.org)
    f. Personal Risk Factors
        i. Lets Talk About Risk Factors for Stroke
3. Change the Way You do things.
    a. Life Style Changes
        i. Lifestyle Changes to Prevent Stroke
    b. Blood Pressure.
        i. Stroke and High Blood Pressure Guidelines
    c. Quit Smoking
        i. 101 on eCigarettes Infographic (stroke.org)

ii. Smoke Free: 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669)

d. High Cholesterol
    i. Reduce ASCVD Risk (heart.org)
    ii. How Can I Improve Cholesterol (heart.org)
    iii. My Cholesterol Guide (heart.org)
    iv. Understanding and Improving Cholesterol Brochure
e. Diabetes
    i. DS-19617 KDBH What is Diabetes (knowdiabetesbyheart.org)
    ii. DS-20119 KDBH Know Your Numbers (knowdiabetesbyheart.org)
f. Healthy Diet
    i. Portion Size
        1. Fruit and Vegetable Serving Sizes Infographic (heart.org)
    ii. Reading Food Labels
        1. Making the Most of the Nutrition Facts Label Infographic
    iii. Mediterranean Diet
        1. Mediterranean Diet (va.gov)
        2. Superfoods (heart.org)
g. Exercise
    i. movemoreinfographicNov2018 (stroke.org)
    ii. AHA Adult Physical Activity Rec Infographic (stroke.org)
    iii. Energy Power-Up to Move More Infographic (stroke.org)
h. Personality Changes
    i. Personality and Mood Changes
    ii. Depression
    iii. Fatigue