



## Heart-Healthy Tips: Lower Your Risk of Stroke

Educate yourself and your department about stroke. Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States, and many survivors are left with permanent disabilities. According to the American Stroke Association, a stroke occurs every 40 seconds. You can help lower your chance of a fatal or debilitating stroke by knowing the warning signs and adopting a healthy lifestyle.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), taking steps to prevent and control high blood pressure, heart disease, and other chronic conditions can decrease your risk of stroke. Below are some tips from the CDC to help in stroke prevention; learn more at [www.cdc.gov/stroke](http://www.cdc.gov/stroke).

- **Prevent and control high blood pressure:** High blood pressure is easy to check and can be controlled with lifestyle changes and with medication when needed. You can work with your doctor to treat high blood pressure and bring it down. Lifestyle actions such as healthy diet, regular physical activity, not smoking, and maintaining a healthy weight will also help you to keep normal blood pressure levels. All adults should have their blood pressure checked on a regular basis.
- **Prevent and control diabetes:** People with diabetes have a higher risk of stroke, but they can also work to reduce their risk. Recent studies suggest that everyone can take steps to reduce their risk for diabetes, such as losing weight, eating healthy, and staying active.
- **No tobacco:** Smoking can affect a number of things that relate to risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. Not smoking or quitting smoking is one of the best things a person can do to lower their risk of stroke. The risk of stroke decreases a few years after quitting smoking. Your doctor can suggest programs to help you quit smoking.
- **Treat atrial fibrillation:** Atrial fibrillation is an irregular beating of the heart. It can cause clots that can lead to stroke. A doctor can prescribe medicines to help reduce the chance of clots.
- **Prevent and control high blood cholesterol:** High blood cholesterol is a major risk factor for heart disease, which can increase the risk for stroke. Preventing and treating high blood cholesterol includes eating a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol and higher in fiber, keeping a healthy weight, and getting regular exercise. A lipoprotein profile can be done to measure several kinds of cholesterol as well as triglycerides (another kind of fat found in the blood). All adults should have their cholesterol levels checked once every five years, and more often if it is found to be high. If it is high, your doctor may prescribe medicines to help lower it.
- **Moderate alcohol use:** Excessive alcohol use can increase the risk of high blood pressure. People who drink should do so in moderation.

*Find more health and wellness tips and resources for first responders at [www.healthy-firefighter.org](http://www.healthy-firefighter.org).*

- **Maintain a healthy weight:** Proper diet and regular physical activity can help to maintain a healthy weight. Learn how to calculate your body mass index (BMI) and what a healthy BMI is.
- **Regular Physical Activity:** The Surgeon General recommends that adults should engage in moderate-level physical activities for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- **Diet and nutrition:** Along with healthy weight and regular physical activity, an overall healthy diet can help to lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels. This includes eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, lowering or cutting out salt or sodium, and eating less saturated fat and cholesterol to lower the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease which can lead to stroke.
- **Genetic Risk Factors:** Stroke can run in families. Genes play a role in stroke risk factors such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and vascular conditions. It is also possible that an increased risk for stroke within a family is due to factors such as a common sedentary lifestyle or poor eating habits, rather than hereditary factors.

Find out more about stroke at [www.strokeassociation.org](http://www.strokeassociation.org). Learn more about heart-health and maintaining a healthy lifestyle with the [Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program](#).

*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*