



Stroke

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Women and Stroke

Acting F.A.S.T. is Key to Stroke Survival



FACE

Does one side of the face droop when smiling?



ARMS

Does one arm drift downward when both arms are raised?



SPEECH

Is speech slurred or strange when repeating a simple phrase?



TIME

If you see any of these signs, call 9-1-1 right away.

Acting F.A.S.T. is key to stroke survival. **Face:** Does one side of the face droop when smiling? **Arms:** Does one arm drift downward when both arms are raised? **Speech:** Is speech slurred or strange when repeating a simple phrase? **Time:** If you see any of these signs, call 9-1-1 immediately.

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Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death for women.¹ In the United States, 1 in 5 women between the ages of 55 and 75 will have a stroke.²

Surprised? You're not alone. Many women do not know their risk of having a stroke.

These facts are alarming, but there is good news: 4 in 5 strokes are preventable.³ That's why it's important to know your risk for stroke and [take action to protect your health](#). And you can [learn more](#) about how CDC and its partners are leading programs to help women reduce their risk for stroke.

What is a stroke?

A stroke, sometimes called a brain attack, happens when blood flow to an area of the brain is blocked or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. Blood carries oxygen to cells in the body. When brain cells are starved of blood, they die.

Stroke is a medical emergency. It's important to act F.A.S.T. and get treatment as soon as possible (see sidebar). Call 9-1-1 right away if you or someone you are with shows any signs of having a stroke.

Some treatments for stroke work only if given within the first 3 hours after symptoms start. A delay in treatment increases the risk of permanent brain damage or death.

What puts women at risk for stroke?

High blood pressure, also called **hypertension**, is a main risk factor for stroke.

More than 2 in 5 women have blood pressure greater than or equal to 130/80 mm Hg or are taking medicine to control their blood pressure.⁴ Only about 1 in 4 of those women have their blood pressure controlled to below 130/80 mm Hg.⁴

Stroke risk increases with **age**. Because women generally live longer than men, more women have strokes over their lifetimes.

Women also have unique risk factors for stroke, including:

- Having **high blood pressure during pregnancy**.
- Using certain types of **birth control medicines**, especially if they also smoke. About 1 in 9 women smoke.⁵
- Having higher rates of **depression**.⁶

Why are African American women at higher risk for stroke?



Alyson McCord struggled to control her high blood pressure for years and eventually had a stroke. She encourages all women to advocate for their health. [Read Alyson's story.](#)

Stroke is a leading cause of death among African American women, who are more likely to die from a stroke than non-Hispanic White women or Hispanic women in the United States.² African Americans have the highest rate of death due to stroke among all racial and ethnic groups.²

- Almost 3 in 5 African American women are diagnosed with **high blood pressure** (greater than or equal to 130/80 mm Hg), which is a much higher proportion than White women (almost 2 in 5).⁷
- African American women are diagnosed with higher rates of **obesity** (nearly 3 in 5) and **diabetes** (more than 1 in 8), conditions that increase the risk for stroke, than White women.^{8,9}

- U.S. adults, including African Americans, consume more than the recommended amounts of salt or sodium, which raises blood pressure and increases the risk for stroke.
- **Sickle cell disease**, a common genetic disorder in African Americans, can lead to a stroke. About 1 in 365 African American babies are born with sickle cell disease.¹⁰
- **Smoking** greatly increases stroke risk. About 1 in 8 African American women smoke.⁸

Why are Hispanic women at risk for stroke?

Stroke is the fourth leading cause of death for Hispanic women.¹

- **High blood pressure** is one of the main risk factors for a stroke. More than 1 in 3 Hispanic women have blood pressure above 130/90 mm Hg.⁷
- People with **diabetes** are at higher risk for stroke. More than 1 in 9 Hispanic women have diabetes—including many who don't know they have the disease.⁹ Among adults of Hispanic origin, diabetes is most common in people of Mexican and Puerto Rican ancestry.⁹
- **Obesity** increases the risk for stroke. About half of Hispanic women have obesity.¹¹

How can I prevent stroke?



High blood pressure is one of the main risk factors for a stroke. [Measure your blood pressure](#) regularly to help your health care team diagnose any health problems early.




Most strokes can be prevented by keeping medical conditions under control and making healthy lifestyle changes:

Know your ABCS of heart and brain health:



- **Aspirin:** Aspirin may help reduce your risk for stroke by preventing blood clots, but you should check with your doctor before taking aspirin to make sure it is right for you.

- **Blood pressure:** Control your blood pressure with healthy lifestyle changes (see below) and take your blood pressure medicines as directed. Learn more about [blood pressure](#).
- **Cholesterol:** Manage your cholesterol with healthy lifestyle changes and take your medicine as directed. Learn more about [cholesterol](#).
- **Smoking:** Don't start smoking. If you do smoke, [learn how to quit](#).

Make lifestyle changes:

- **Eat healthy:** Choose healthy foods most of the time, including foods with less salt, or sodium, to lower your blood pressure, and that are rich in fiber and whole grains to manage your cholesterol. Learn more about [healthy eating](#)  basics from ChooseMyPlate.gov, as well as small steps you can take to [boost your healthy eating habits](#)  from the "Live to the Beat" campaign.
- **Get regular physical activity:** [Regular physical activity](#) helps you reach and maintain a healthy weight and keeps your heart and blood vessels healthier. Find [inspiration and tips for getting regular physical activity](#)  from the "Live to the Beat" campaign.


Work with your health care team:

- **Talk to your doctor** about your chances of having a stroke, including your age and whether anyone in your family has had a stroke. Learn how to [find the right doctor for you](#)  from the "Live to the Beat" campaign and how to make small steps toward heart-healthy living from the "[Start Small. Live Big.](#)"  campaign.
- **Get other health conditions under control**, such as [diabetes](#) or [heart disease](#).

What is CDC doing about stroke?

CDC and its partners are leading national initiatives and programs to reduce rates of death and disability caused by stroke and to help women live longer, healthier lives.

CDC's [Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention](#) (DHDSP) provides resources to all 50 states to address heart disease and stroke, as well as helping lead or support the following:

- The [WISEWOMAN](#) program provides low-income, underinsured, or uninsured women with chronic disease risk factor screening, lifestyle programs, and referral services in an effort to prevent heart disease and strokes.
- [The Paul Coverdell National Acute Stroke Program](#) funds states to reduce death and disabilities from stroke.
- The [Million Hearts](#)®  initiative, which is co-led by CDC and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, works with other federal agencies and private-sector partners to raise awareness about heart disease and stroke and prevent attacks and strokes.

Related Stroke Survivor Stories



Being a Health Advocate: Alyson McCord

A series of mini-strokes, followed by a major stroke, compelled Alyson McCord to get her high blood pressure under control.



Hemorrhagic Stroke: Wanda Sturtz

When it comes to stroke, recognizing the symptoms and acting F.A.S.T. can save a life.



Postpartum Risk for Stroke: Brooke Bergfeld

Brooke was celebrating being a new mom when she had a stroke just a week after giving birth. She didn't know pregnancy can increase stroke risk.

Read all [Stroke Survivor Stories](#)

More information

For more information on women and stroke, visit the following websites.

CDC

- [High Blood Pressure](#)
- [High Blood Pressure During Pregnancy](#)
- [Women and Heart Disease](#)
- [Salt](#)
- [Cholesterol](#)

Million Hearts[®] and CDC Foundation

- [“Start Small. Live Big.”](#) This campaign encourages adults 55 and older, to get back on track with the small steps—like scheduling their medical appointments, getting active, and eating healthy—so they can get back to living big.
- [“Live to the Beat.”](#) This campaign focuses on empowering Black adults to pursue heart-healthy lifestyles on their own terms—to find what works best individually and consistently—as they live to their own beat.




Other Organizations

- American Stroke Association (ASA): [About Stroke](#)
 - ASA Resources in Spanish: [Recursos en Español](#)
- National, Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: [Stroke](#)
 - [Heart Health and Pregnancy](#)
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS): [Stroke Information Page](#)
 - [NINDS Know Stroke Campaign](#)
 - [NINDS Know Stroke Campaign Spanish Toolkit](#)

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