



# Ask The Pharmacist

## Knowing And Reducing Your Risks For Stroke

by Lisa Chavis

(NAPSA)—You can protect yourself from stroke. That's just as well, considering every 45 seconds, someone in the U.S. has one. It kills about 160,000 people a year, mostly women; annually, about 40,000 more women than men have strokes and over 60 percent of all stroke deaths occur in women.



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It's important to know the risk factors, some of which are preventable and controllable, and to recognize the symptoms so that many of the serious side effects can be avoided.

**Blood Pressure:** According to the American Heart Association, high blood pressure is the number one controllable risk factor for stroke. Family history and obesity factor in developing high blood pressure and women who take birth control pills or have reached menopause are at higher risk. A healthy lifestyle helps but for many, medications are required.

**Cholesterol:** High levels of "bad" low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol raise the risk of heart disease and stroke; high levels of "good" high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol lower it. Studies show women's cholesterol is higher than men's from age 45 on and that low levels of HDL cholesterol seem to be a stronger risk factor for women.

**Diabetes:** Diabetes is associated with high blood pressure and interferes with the ability to break down clots, increasing the risk of ischemic stroke. Lifestyle modifications and medications can help.

**Diet and Exercise:** Thirty minutes a day of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity can help prevent heart and blood vessel disease and control blood cholesterol, diabetes and obesity, as well as lower blood



### **Surprisingly, women are at greater risk of stroke than men.**

pressure. People with excess body fat—especially around the waist—are more likely to develop heart disease and stroke. Eat healthy foods low in saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium.

**Smoking and Drinking:** Smokers and those exposed to smoke daily are at a greater risk for stroke. Excessive alcohol intake can contribute to high blood pressure.

**Stroke Symptoms:** It's vital to recognize the symptoms of stroke and to seek help immediately. Time is of the essence when it comes to preventing debilitating and long-lasting effects. Symptoms include sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body; sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding; sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes; sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination, or a sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

For more information about strokes and cardiac conditions, visit [www.medco.com/health](http://www.medco.com/health).

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