

# Health Bulletin



## Reducing Your Risk Of Stroke

(NAPSA)—While strokes are a leading cause of death and disability in adults in the United States, there are ways to reduce your risk of having one.

Sometimes called a “brain attack,” a stroke happens when blood flow is cut off to part of the brain, starving brain cells of oxygen. Within minutes, those cells begin to die, which can lead to permanent damage if not treated quickly.

### Reducing Your Risk

Some of the common risk factors for stroke include high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, smoking and a family history of strokes. Fortunately, there are many steps you can take to reduce your risk of stroke (and other related diseases like heart attacks).

Engage in a healthy lifestyle by eating a healthy diet, being physically active and quitting smoking. Also, take steps to keep your blood pressure, blood cholesterol and blood sugar under control by visiting your doctor or nurse. He or she can be a valuable resource for helping you improve your health and treating any conditions that might raise your risk for stroke.

### An Uncommon Risk Factor

A less common risk factor for stroke is carotid artery stenosis, the narrowing of the arteries that run along the sides of the neck that carry blood from your heart to your brain. This condition affects only one half to 1 percent of the population and causes a relatively small percentage of strokes. You may be at increased risk of developing carotid artery stenosis if you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes or a history of heart disease. Older age and smoking are also risk factors.

### More Harm Than Good

Screening for carotid artery stenosis is often done by listening to the neck with a stethoscope for unusual sounds from the arteries.



**A healthy lifestyle can help reduce your risk of stroke.**

Another method is to use ultrasound, a painless test that uses sound waves to create a picture of the arteries (similar to the ultrasound that pregnant women get to see the baby inside the womb). Health care professionals can look at the pictures to see whether the arteries are narrowed or blocked.

Carotid artery stenosis screening, however, has little or no overall benefit for preventing stroke for most adults. In fact, this screening can be harmful because it often leads to a cascade of follow-up testing and surgeries that themselves can cause stroke, heart attack or death. Because the condition is rare, screening all adults would also lead to many false-positives (test results that say a person has a disease when he or she does not) and can lead to unnecessary surgeries. As a result, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends against carotid artery stenosis screening for the general population.

Work with your doctor or nurse to talk about any concerns you may have about your risk for stroke and ask about ways that you can reduce your risk by exercising, eating well and managing any chronic diseases, including high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol.

### Stroke Symptoms: Time to Act

Even if you take steps to reduce your risk, it's important to know the signs and symptoms of stroke so you can act quickly and potentially avoid devastating consequences. These include:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg—especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

If you notice any of these symptoms in yourself or in someone near you, call 911 and get immediate medical help. A stroke is an emergency and quick treatment can help prevent long-term brain damage or even death.

It is also important to tell your doctor if you have a history of stroke or transient ischemic attack, or TIA (a “ministroke”). If you have had TIA or a stroke, the Task Force recommendation on carotid artery stenosis screening does not apply to you. Your doctor can work with you to develop a plan based on your individual health to prevent a future stroke.

### Protecting Your Health

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force makes evidence-based recommendations on primary care services. Recently, the Task Force reviewed evidence on screening for carotid artery stenosis in the general adult population.

### Learn More

For more information on the Task Force and to read the full report on carotid artery stenosis screening, visit [www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org](http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org).