



## IMPORTANT FACTS THAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT STROKE

Black women in Connecticut are the group most disproportionately impacted by stroke. Use the information in this brochure to reduce your chance of becoming part of the statistic.



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## **Stroke facts\* for Black women in Connecticut**

- The stroke death rate for Black women in Connecticut is 30% higher than for White women, and 20% higher than for Hispanic women
- Black women in Connecticut are about three times as likely to die from a stroke before the age of 75 than White women, and 2.6 times as likely than Hispanic women
- Among any racial, ethnic and gender categories in Connecticut, Black women have the highest age-adjusted death rate for stroke
- There was virtually no change in stroke mortality rates of Black women in Connecticut during the 1990's. In contrast, stroke mortality rates of Black males in Connecticut decreased significantly during this same period
- There was virtually no change in stroke disparities between Black and White women in Connecticut during the 1990's.

**Don't become part of these statistics.**

**Start today by using this brochure to promote healthy eating habits, a healthy body, and a healthy heart.**

# What is a stroke?

A stroke or “brain attack” occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is suddenly interrupted or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts.

When either of these things happen, brain cells die because they are no longer receiving the oxygen and nutrients they need from the blood.

As brain cells die during a stroke, the functions controlled by that area of the brain are lost. These functions include speech, movement and memory. How much a stroke affects these functions depends on where the stroke occurs in the brain and how much the brain is damaged.

You can reduce your risk of stroke. The first step is to learn about your risk factors for stroke. Some you cannot change or control; some you can, by making a few changes in your daily habits or taking medications prescribed by your health care provider.

## Risk factors for stroke

Some risk factors for stroke cannot be changed. Other risk factors can be changed, treated or controlled.

### **Risk factors that cannot be changed:**

- *Age.* The risk of stroke increases with age.
- *Family history.* The risk of stroke is greater in people who have a family history of stroke.
- *Race.* African Americans have at high risk for stroke. This is mainly because African Americans have a higher risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity.

*(Risk factors that cannot be changed, continued)*

- *Sex or Gender.* The incidence of stroke is about slightly higher for men.

**Risk factors that can be changed, treated or controlled:**

- *High blood pressure.* High blood pressure is the most important controllable risk factor for stroke.
- *Cigarette smoking.* Studies have shown cigarette smoking to be an important risk factor for stroke.
- *Diabetes.* People with diabetes are at increased risk for stroke.
- *High cholesterol.* People with high blood cholesterol have an increased risk for stroke.
- *Obesity.* Being overweight increases your risk of stroke.
- *Lack of physical activity.* Physical inactivity increases stroke risk.
- *Excessive alcohol use.* Alcohol can raise blood pressure and lead to a stroke.
- *Some illegal drug use.* Intravenous drug use and cocaine have been linked to stroke.
- *TIAs (transient ischemic attacks).* TIAs produce stroke-like symptoms, but no lasting damage. They are strong predictors of stroke.

# High blood pressure

High blood pressure is the most important risk factor for stroke. It's called the "Silent Killer" because it usually has no symptoms. High blood pressure is a reading of 140/90 mmHg or more that stays high over time.

## Some things you can do to lower your blood pressure:

- *Eat healthy foods.* Eat more fruits, vegetables, and low fat dairy foods. Eat foods that are low in saturated fat, total fat, and cholesterol.
- *Reduce salt and sodium in your diet.* Read food labels to choose foods that are lower in sodium. Limit sodium intake to 2,400 mg, or about 1 tablespoon's worth of salt each day. Avoid fast foods that are high in salt and sodium.
- *Maintain a healthy weight.* Limit portion sizes, especially of high calorie foods. Try to eat only as many calories as you burn each day.
- *Be physically active.* Being physically active is one of the most important steps you can take to prevent or control high blood pressure. It also helps reduce your risk of heart disease. It doesn't take much effort to be physically active.
- *Limit alcohol intake.* Drinking too much alcohol can raise blood pressure. If you drink alcoholic beverages, have only a moderate amount — one drink a day for women
- *Take medication as prescribed.* If your health provider gives you medication for your blood pressure, take it as prescribed.
- *Talk to your health care professional.* Ask what your blood pressure numbers are and ask what they mean. Ask your doctor what you can do to lower your blood pressure.

# Smoking

Smoking injures blood vessel walls and speeds up the process of hardening of the arteries, even when filtered cigarettes are smoked. Smoking increases blood pressure and increases the risk of a blood clot. The chemicals in tobacco smoke deprive the blood of oxygen which doubles a smoker's risk of stroke.

If you smoke, quit. If you don't smoke, don't start. Once you quit, your risk of heart disease from smoking decreases after one year. Your risk of heart attack from smoking actually decreases after 24 hours of quitting. If you need help quitting smoking, talk to your health care provider or call the Connecticut Quitline at 1-866-END-HABIT (1-866-363-4224).

# Diabetes

If you have it, control it. Diabetes is controllable, but having it greatly increases the risk of stroke. People with diabetes often have high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and are overweight, increasing risks even more.

For more information on diabetes, talk to your health care provider or visit the American Diabetes Association at [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org) or call 1-800-DIABETES (1-800-342-2383).

# High cholesterol

A high level of total cholesterol in the blood is a major risk factor for heart disease, which raises your risk of stroke. A blood cholesterol level over 200 mg/dL increases the risk for heart attack and stroke.

High levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol and triglycerides (blood fats) can increase the risk of stroke in people, including those with prior coronary heart disease, ischemic stroke or TIA.

A high level of HDL (“good”) cholesterol lowers your risk of heart disease and stroke. A low level of HDL cholesterol raises the risk of heart disease and stroke. Know your cholesterol numbers by getting screened. Talk to your health care provider about cholesterol.

## **Obesity and lack of physical activity**

Being inactive, obese or both can increase your risk for high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Walking, taking the stairs, yard work are examples of physical activity and can help you lose weight. Try to get a total of at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most or all days. If you’ve been inactive for a while and are planning to start an exercise program, please be sure to check with your health care provider.

## **Alcohol**

Alcohol abuse can raise your blood pressure and lead to a stroke. Avoid drinking and if you do drink, it is recommended that women limit themselves to no more than one drink a day. One drink equals about 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1 ounce of 100-proof whiskey. Additionally, alcoholic drinks are often high in calories and may contribute to unwanted weight gain. Also, alcohol can interfere with the effectiveness of some blood pressure medications and increase their side effects.

## **Illegal and recreational drug use**

Intravenous drug abuse carries a high risk of stroke from cerebral embolism (a blood clot or other particle that lodges in the brain). Cocaine use has also been linked to strokes and heart attacks. Some have been fatal even in first-time users.

## **Get regular health care**

Some people are fearful of doctors and health care facilities. For some, this may have come from hearing bad or exaggerated stories of the real or imagined experiences of other people. You should not assume that your experience will be the same.

You should not ignore health problems. Denial will not make the problem go away. According to the Association of Black Cardiologists (ABC), everyone, no matter how healthy, should see a doctor every 1-3 years depending upon age and medical history. This will allow you to identify problems early and have more options available for treatment.

The ABC also recommends that you find a health care provider you are comfortable with. If you don't already have a health care provider that you see regularly, it's time to find one. Think of it as a partnership: You and your doctor are working on a project together, and the project is your health.

Before each visit, write down a list of the questions you have. Then, make sure you get answers to all of your questions. It may be helpful to bring a friend along. If there isn't time to get all the answers you need, talk with your doctor about this. If he or she isn't responsive, it may be time to find a different health care provider.

## ***Congratulations on getting started!***

*By reading this resource booklet you've begun the first steps toward living a healthier lifestyle. Remember that taking these steps should be a gradual process. Don't expect to make a lot of changes overnight. The good thing to keep in mind is that even small steps can produce positive changes in your health.*

*You're not just doing this for yourself. You're also taking care of yourself for your family and all of your loved ones.*



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## **STROKE WARNING SIGNS**

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

**IF YOU HAVE TROUBLE WITH ANY OF THESE TASKS, CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY.**



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*Thank you to the WISEWOMAN development team  
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