Understand and prevent stroke

› What is a stroke?
› How to prevent a stroke
› The F.A.S.T. test

strokefoundation.org.au/prevent
**What is a stroke?**

**Stroke attacks the brain** – the human control centre. A stroke happens when the blood supply carrying oxygen and nutrients to the brain is interrupted. When brain cells do not get enough blood, they die at a rapid rate (up to 1.9 million brain cells every minute).

Stroke can affect people physically and emotionally, as well as the way they think – from muscle weakness and speech difficulties, to memory, hearing or vision issues.

**Every stroke is different.** It all depends on where in the brain the stroke occurs and how severe it is.

**There are two types of stroke:**

- **Ischaemic stroke**
  
  Blood clot or plaque blocks artery

- **Haemorrhagic stroke**
  
  Artery breaks or bursts

Stroke is a serious medical emergency requiring urgent medical attention, but with the right treatment at the right time, many people are able to make a good recovery.

Some of the more recent advances in treatment are time critical, and can only be provided within the first few hours of stroke. The earlier treatment is delivered, the better the outcome for the patient.

**Stroke is always a medical emergency.**

**Call triple zero (000) at the first sign of stroke.**

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**How is a TIA different?**

A **transient ischaemic attack (TIA)** happens when the blood supply to your brain is blocked temporarily. The signs are the same as a stroke, but they disappear within a short time. Often, they are only present for a few minutes.

**A TIA should never be ignored.** Call triple zero (000) immediately if you think you may be having a TIA, even if the signs go away and you feel better.

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**How to recognise a stroke**

**Think F.A.S.T.**

- Has their **FACE** drooped?
- Can they **lift both ARMS**?
- Is their **SPEECH** slurred and do they understand you?
- Call **000**,

**If you see any of these symptoms: Act FAST call 000**

Share the F.A.S.T. message with family and friends.

If you are the one having a stroke, you need the people around you to recognise the signs and act FAST!
Managing your stroke risk

There are some risk factors you cannot do anything about, like:

› Age – the older you get the greater your risk of stroke.
› Gender – stroke is more common in men.
› A family history of stroke – having a parent or sibling who has had a previous stroke.
› If you’ve had a previous stroke or transient ischaemic attack (TIA).

The good news is more than 80% of strokes can be prevented.

Following are five steps to a healthy life that will help you reduce your stroke risk:

1. Make time for a health check
2. Eat well
3. Stay active
4. Drink alcohol only in moderation
5. Be smoke free
When did you last book yourself in for a health check-up?
A regular check-up with your doctor, particularly once you turn 45, can help detect and manage some of the biggest stroke risks.

- **Ask for a blood pressure check** – High blood pressure (or hypertension) is the top risk factor for stroke.

  High blood pressure can weaken blood vessels leading to a bleed in the brain or cause clots or plaque to block a brain artery causing a stroke.

  It’s a hidden risk. High blood pressure has no immediate symptoms so the only way you know you have it is to get checked by a doctor or pharmacist.

  The test is quick and painless – and high blood pressure is treatable.

- **Check your cholesterol levels** – The main cause of high cholesterol is a diet high in saturated fats (fats from animal foods). Ask your doctor for a cholesterol test and reduce saturated fats in your diet.

- **Stay on top of type 2 diabetes** – Talk to your doctor about managing type 2 diabetes by maintaining blood glucose levels through diet, regular exercise and monitoring.

- **Get to the heart of it** – Atrial fibrillation (AF or an irregular heartbeat) can cause clots to form in the heart, which can move to the brain, leading to a stroke. Ask your doctor for an AF check, especially if you feel your heart beating irregularly, either in your chest or by taking your own pulse. If your pulse is not ‘ticking like a clock’ you could have AF. Talk to your doctor about treatment options.

**What is blood pressure?**
Blood pressure is the measurement of the force put on blood vessel walls as blood travels through your body. Blood pressure varies throughout the day to meet your body’s needs.

Optimal blood pressure is around 120/80 so if your blood pressure is regularly over 140/90, you may have high blood pressure.
Are you eating from the five food groups every day?
Having a poor diet can increase your risk of high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

› Balance your diet – Mix it up with vegetables, fruit and grain, lean meats, poultry and fish, reduced fat milk and yoghurt. Reduce saturated fats like butter or fried foods.

› Drop the salt – Cut out salt and check the sodium content on packaged foods.

› Substitute your sugar – Swap sweet snacks for nuts or fresh fruit. Steer clear of sugary drinks – drink water.

› Go fresh – Buy from markets or shop around the outside aisles of the supermarket.

Do you raise your heart rate through exercise at least 2.5-5 hours a week?
Being inactive, overweight or carrying too much body fat can contribute to high blood pressure and high cholesterol. It can also lead to heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Regular physical activity can reduce your risk of stroke.

› Walk – Substitute a car journey for a walk or go for a bushwalk. Pick up your pace to a faster rate than usual.

› Sign up for a weekly class – Such as dancing, aerobics or crossfit.

› Get moving outdoors – Whether it’s a bike ride, a swim or working up a sweat in the garden, enjoy the great outdoors.

Tip – Plan your weekly menu in advance.
Tip – Make one activity part of every week.
Drink alcohol only in moderation

Do you know your alcohol limit?
The health risks from alcohol accumulate over your lifetime. This means the more you drink, the greater the risk. Responsible drinking is about balancing your enjoyment of alcohol with the potential risks that may arise from drinking.

› Think before you drink – Drinking large amounts of alcohol increases your risk of stroke. Regular, heavy drinking can raise blood pressure to consistently high levels. This increases the risk of both types of stroke (bleed and clot).

› Stop at two – For both men and women, drinking no more than two standard drinks on any day reduces your lifetime risk of harm.

Tip – Check the drink label to see how many standard drinks you are actually consuming.

Be smoke free

Did you know it is never too late to stop smoking?
Smoking has so many negative impacts on the body. It increases stroke risk by increasing blood pressure and reducing the oxygen to the brain.

› Halve your stroke risk – Smokers have twice the risk of having a stroke than non-smokers.

› Immediate impacts – There are immediate health benefits from quitting, even if you already suffer health problems. Within 24 hours of quitting your body starts to repair.

› The benefits continue – Within a month of quitting, blood pressure can return to its normal range. The risk of heart attack and stroke starts to drop immediately, and can drop by up to half after a year.

Tip – There is a lot of help available to quit smoking. Call Quitline (13 7848).
How to get more involved

Stroke can be prevented, it can be treated and it can be beaten.

Join with us to stand alongside stroke survivors, health professionals and researchers to combat this disease.

Can you help?

- **Give time** – become a volunteer.
- **Raise funds** – donate or hold a fundraising event.
- **Speak up** – join our advocacy team.
- **Leave a lasting legacy** – include a gift in your Will.
- **Know your numbers** – check your health regularly.
- **Stay informed** – keep up-to-date and share our message.

1300 194 196

About the Stroke Foundation

The Stroke Foundation is a national charity that partners with the community to prevent stroke, save lives and enhance recovery.

- **StrokeLine 1800 STROKE (1800 787 653)**
- strokefoundation.org.au
- /strokefoundation
- @strokefdn
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