

# High blood pressure and stroke

## What is a stroke?

A stroke occurs when the supply of blood to the brain is suddenly disrupted by a clot, plaque or a bleed when an artery bursts. When blood stops flowing, the brain does not receive oxygen it needs and therefore brain cells in the area die and permanent damage may be done. The good news is stroke is largely preventable and treatable.

## What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the pressure of your blood on the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps (systolic) and relaxes (diastolic).

Although blood pressure can vary throughout the day such as during exercise or with stress, our body aims to maintain our blood pressure in a tight range.

Sustained high blood pressure (hypertension) puts a strain on blood vessels over time and is an important risk factor for stroke. It is the most preventable cause of stroke worldwide.

## What causes high blood pressure?

There are a number of risk factors that have been linked to high blood pressure. These include:

- › High blood pressure puts extra stress on the heart that can lead to abnormal heart rhythm which can lead to clots forming and travelling to the brain.

- › A family history of high blood pressure.
- › Getting older
- › Men are more likely to have high blood pressure than women.
- › Being overweight.
- › Lack of exercise.
- › Excessive alcohol drinking.
- › Smoking.
- › Diabetes.
- › A diet high in salt. All types of salt that contain sodium can significantly impact blood pressure.

## Why does blood pressure matter?

High blood pressure can have many harmful effects which can eventually lead to stroke.

- › High blood pressure puts extra stress on blood vessel walls, causing them to stiffen and narrow. This can lead to clots forming and travelling to the brain, which can reduce blood supply to the brain.
- › High blood pressure can also weaken blood vessel walls taking blood to the brain, leading to a bleed in the brain.
- › High blood pressure can cause blood clots or plaque (cholesterol and other fatty-like substances) to break off artery walls which then block a brain artery causing a stroke.

Know your numbers*	Recommended action
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Severe blood pressure</b> BP 180/100mmHg or higher	<b>IMMEDIATE ACTION – DO NOT IGNORE</b> See your doctor urgently.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>High blood pressure</b> BP 140/90mmHg or higher	<b>SEE YOUR DOCTOR FOR A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT</b> Please take this brochure to your doctor.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Normal blood pressure</b> BP 120-140/80-90mmHg	<b>MONITOR YOUR RISK FACTORS</b> If you have identified other risk factors or your BP is at the high end of this range, talk to your doctor about a full risk assessment at your next appointment.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Optimal blood pressure</b> BP 120/80mmHg or lower	<b>MONITOR YOUR RISK FACTORS</b> If you have identified other risk factors above talk to your doctor about what you can do to stay healthy.

\*This is an assessment only considering blood pressure risk. You should also consider if you have other factors listed above (such as smoking, older age etc) which will increase your risk of stroke, heart disease or type 2 diabetes. Please consult your doctor for a full risk assessment.

## High blood pressure is treatable

It is important to see your doctor immediately if your blood pressure is greater than 160/100mmHg.

If you have high blood pressure or multiple risk factors for heart disease or stroke, your doctor may prescribe medication to lower your blood pressure.

Your doctor may recommend medication, lifestyle changes or a mix of both to lower your blood pressure. Medication does not cure high blood pressure, it can only help control it. Most people who are treated for high blood pressure will need to keep taking medication over a lifetime.

## Stroke symptoms

FAST is an easy way to remember and recognise the signs of stroke.



Recognise  
**STROKE**  
Think **F.A.S.T.**

**F** Has their **FACE** drooped?  
**A** Can they lift both **ARMS**?  
**S** Is their **SPEECH** slurred and do they understand you?  
**T** Call **000**, **TIME** is critical

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

Stroke FOUNDATION

Stroke Foundation is a national charity that partners with the community to prevent stroke, save lives and enhance recovery. We stand alongside stroke survivors and their families, healthcare professionals and researchers. We build community awareness and foster new thinking. We support survivors on their journey to live the best possible life after stroke.

## How to get more involved

- + **Know your numbers** – check your health regularly
- 📡 **Stay informed** – keep up-to-date and share our message.
- 🕒 **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.

**4.7 million**  
Australians  
live with  
**HIGH BLOOD**  
**PRESSURE**



## Things you can do to lower your risk

There are a number of factors you can control to help reduce your blood pressure and chances of having a stroke.

- › **Know your blood pressure.** The lower your blood pressure the lower your risk of stroke. Get it checked by a GP or Pharmacist.
- › **Healthy eating.** Enjoy a variety of foods especially plant based foods including fresh fruit and vegetables, legumes and wholegrain breads and cereals.
- › **Get active.** Try to engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week. Every move counts, through being active at a higher intensity will result in a greater health benefit.
- › **Drop the salt.** Cut down on takeaway foods and don't add salt at the table or when cooking. Check the salt content in all processed foods and aim for 400mg/100g of sodium or less.
- › **Limit alcohol.** Stay within recommended limits for drinking alcohol.
- › **Be smoke-free.** Quit smoking. Call Quitline on 13 7848.



## Contact us

- 📞 **StrokeLine 1800 787 653**
- 🌐 **strokefoundation.org.au**
- 📘 **/strokefoundation**
- 🐦 **@strokefdn**
- 📷 **@strokefdn**