

Understand and prevent stroke



- › What is a stroke?
- › How to recognise a stroke
- › Lower your risk of stroke



strokefoundation.org.au/prevent

What is a stroke?

Stroke attacks the brain – the human control centre.

A stroke is when blood can't get to all parts of your brain.

Blood flows through your arteries. Arteries are like tubes or pipes. Blood carries oxygen and nutrients for your brain cells. Your brain can be injured if blood can't get through.

The arteries can get blocked. This is an ischaemic stroke. The arteries can break, causing bleeding in the brain. This is a haemorrhagic stroke.

Stroke can happen at any age.

A stroke can change how well someone can walk, move, talk, swallow, think, feel and see. How a stroke changes someone depends on:

- › Which part of the brain was injured
- › How badly it was injured.

More than 80% of strokes can be prevented. You can take action to lower your risk of stroke.

What is a TIA?

A transient ischaemic attack (TIA) is when blood can't get to all parts of the brain for a short time.

The signs are the same as for a stroke, but they disappear completely within a short time. Often, they are only present for a few minutes.

After a TIA, your risk of stroke is higher.

How to recognise a stroke

Stroke is always a medical emergency.

If you have a stroke, treatment can help you. You need to get to hospital quickly.

Always call triple zero (000) if you see any of the signs of stroke.

Even if you aren't sure, or the signs only last for a few minutes, call triple zero (000).

Learn the F.A.S.T. signs of STROKE



FACE
drooped?



ARM
can't be raised?



SPEECH
slurred or confused?



TIME
is critical! Call 000.

If you see any of these signs
Act FAST call triple zero (000)



Share the F.A.S.T. message with family and friends. We need everyone to know the signs, and to call triple zero (000).

Lower your risk of stroke

A stroke risk factor increases your risk of having a stroke.

There are some stroke risk factors that you can't do anything about – being older, being male, a family history of stroke or already having had a stroke.

But everyone can take action to lower their risk:

- › Have a health check with your general practitioner (GP)
- › Be active, eat well, be a healthy weight, avoid alcohol and don't smoke.

Have a health check with your GP

A regular health check is a simple way to understand and lower your risk of stroke.

Your risk goes up as you get older, so a health check is especially important once you turn 45.

If you are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, you need a regular health check once you turn 30.



Ask for a Health Check

A Health Check takes as little as 20 minutes.

Your GP will assess your risk of having a stroke or heart attack. They'll talk with you about your risk factors and what you need to do to lower your risk. Your GP can help you make healthy choices part of your daily life. They will let you know if you need medication to lower your risk.

Get your blood pressure checked

High blood pressure (hypertension) is the biggest risk factor for stroke.

High blood pressure can lead to blocked arteries. It can also make them weaker, causing them to break. These things can cause a stroke.

Normal blood pressure is around 120/80.

If your blood pressure is regularly over 140/90, you have high blood pressure. The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to get it checked by a GP, nurse or pharmacist.

Check for an irregular pulse

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is a heart condition. Your heart beats fast and out of rhythm. AF can lead to blocked arteries. This can cause a stroke.

If you have AF, you may have a pounding or fluttering heartbeat. This is also called having heart palpitations. Some people experience symptoms such as an irregular pulse, shortness of breath, chest pain, tiredness, dizziness, or feeling faint or lightheaded. Some people don't notice any symptoms at all.

A doctor can check your pulse. If it feels irregular, they will organise more tests.

Get your cholesterol checked

Cholesterol is a type of fat in the blood. High cholesterol can lead to blocked arteries. This can cause a stroke.

High total cholesterol is 5.5 mmol/L or more. However, a good level for your cholesterol depends on your other risk factors.

Your GP can:

- › Arrange a cholesterol check
- › Talk with you about maintaining healthy cholesterol levels.

Check for type 2 diabetes

If left undiagnosed or untreated, diabetes can lead to blocked arteries. This can cause a stroke.

If you have diabetes, check your blood sugar when you're supposed to. Talk with your GP about medication and healthy choices to help manage your diabetes.





Get active

Not doing enough physical activity is the second biggest risk factor for stroke. It can lead to high blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol. It can also lead to being overweight. These things increase your risk of stroke.

Aim to be active for 30 minutes most days. You can break it up into short sessions. You need to increase your heart rate, feel a little warm and get a bit out of breath. You need to do activities that build muscle strength too.

Your 30 minutes can be any kind of exercise or activity. Get into activities you enjoy. Invite friends and family to join in.

Talk to your GP before starting an exercise program. Your GP can refer you to a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist. They can help you get active.

Visit health.gov.au/health-topics/physical-activity-and-exercise



Healthy eating

Eating unhealthy food can lead to high blood pressure and cholesterol. It can also lead to being overweight. These things increase your risk of stroke.

The key to eating well is to enjoy a variety of nutritious foods from each of the five food groups:

- › Vegetables, legumes, beans
- › Fruit
- › Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and high fibre
- › Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, legumes, beans
- › Milk, yoghurt, cheese or alternatives, mostly reduced fat.

Drink plenty of water. Cut down the amount of salt, sugar and saturated fat you eat.

Eat more of the healthy foods you enjoy. Cook at home, and share mealtimes with family and friends if you can.

Your GP can refer you to a dietitian. A dietitian can help you with healthy eating.

Visit [eatforhealth.gov.au](https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au)



Be a healthy weight

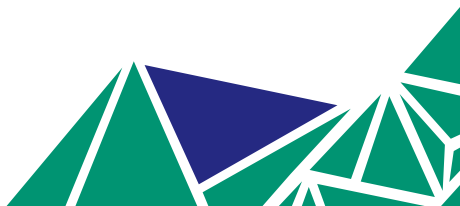
Being overweight can lead to high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes. These things increase your risk of stroke.

Your doctor can give you advice on what is a healthy weight for you. You can get there by healthy eating and being more active.

Start by setting a small goal and making small changes that will get you there. If you are overweight, losing just 5% of your body weight can improve your health.

Your GP can refer you to a dietitian and a physiotherapist. They can help you get to a healthy weight.

Visit [health.gov.au/health-topics/overweight-and-obesity](https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/overweight-and-obesity)



Don't smoke

Smoking can lead to high blood pressure. It narrows and hardens your arteries and increases the stickiness of blood. All these things increase your risk of stroke.

Breathing in other people's smoke also increases your risk of stroke. Only 100% smoke-free environments can protect you from the effects of passive smoking.

It's never too late to stop smoking. Once you stop, your risk of stroke drops immediately.

It can be hard to quit smoking so make sure you get the help you need.

Call **Quitline 13 78 48**



Avoid alcohol

Alcohol can lead to high blood pressure and atrial fibrillation. It can contribute to being overweight and make diabetes harder to control. These things increase your risk of stroke.

The Australian Guidelines say healthy men and women should have no more than 10 standard drinks a week, and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day.

The Guidelines are for healthy people.

Talk with your doctor about alcohol and your risk of stroke.

Check the drink label to see how many standard drinks you are having. The less you drink, the lower your risk of harm from alcohol.

Your GP can tell you about help to cut down or stop drinking alcohol.

Visit nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/alcohol

StrokeLine

StrokeLine's allied health professionals provide advice on stroke prevention, treatment and recovery.

StrokeLine is a practical, free and confidential service. StrokeLine can help you manage your health better and live well.

Call **1800 787 653**






Email strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, Australian Eastern Standard Time.

How to get more involved

Stroke Foundation partners with the community to prevent stroke, save lives and enhance recovery. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting survivors of stroke.

Can you help?

-  **Lower your risk of stroke** – have a regular health check.
-  **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.

Keep up to date and share our message

-  1300 194 196
-  StrokeLine 1800 STROKE (1800 787 653)
-  strokefoundation.org.au
-  [/strokefoundation](https://www.facebook.com/strokefoundation)
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