



Stroke FAQs

What is a stroke?

A stroke occurs either when the blood supply to part of the brain is blocked or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. Brain cells that do not get oxygen become injured and die. Death or permanent disability can result.

An ischemic stroke occurs when an artery that supplies blood and oxygen to the brain becomes blocked, usually by blood clots or by a narrowing of the arteries by a buildup of plaque (a mixture of fatty substances including cholesterol and other lipids) and blood clots inside the artery walls.

A hemorrhagic stroke occurs when an artery in the brain bursts. There are two main types of hemorrhagic stroke. An intracerebral hemorrhage occurs when a blood vessel in the brain leaks blood into the brain itself. A subarachnoid hemorrhage is bleeding under the outer membranes of the brain and into the thin fluid-filled space that surrounds the brain. A subarachnoid hemorrhage can cause extensive damage to the brain and is the most deadly of all strokes.

For more information about stroke types, treatment and outcomes, please see our [About Stroke](#) page.

What are the symptoms of stroke?

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke notes these major signs of stroke:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arms, or legs
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding others
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

All of the major symptoms of stroke appear suddenly, and often there is more than one symptom at the same time.

What should a bystander do?

If you think someone is having a stroke, you should call 9–1–1 or emergency medical services right away.

Why is there a need to act fast?

Death or permanent disability can result from a stroke. With timely treatment, however, the risk

of death and disability from stroke can be lowered. It is very important to know the symptoms of a stroke and act right away.

What are the risk factors for stroke?

Some conditions as well as some lifestyle factors can put people at a higher risk for stroke. The most important risk factors for stroke are high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and cigarette smoking. Persons who have already had a stroke need to control the risk factors in order to lower their risk of having another stroke. All persons can take steps to lower their risk for stroke. For more information about these risk factors, please see our **Risk Factors** section.

What can you do to reduce your risk of stroke?

All persons can take steps to lower their risk of stroke by maintaining normal blood pressure levels or controlling high blood pressure, preventing or treating heart disease and stroke, and by not using tobacco.

What is the burden of stroke on Americans?

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States. About 795,000 strokes occur in the US each year. About 610,000 of these are first or new strokes. About 185,000 occur in people who have already had a stroke before. Additionally, stroke is a leading cause of permanent long term disability. For more stroke facts and statistical information, please see our **Stroke Facts and Statistics** section.

What is the cost of stroke for our nation?

According to the American Heart Association, stroke will cost almost \$68.9 billion in direct and indirect costs in 2009 (American Heart Association. Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics—2009 Update. American Heart Association; 2009).

What is CDC doing to address stroke?

CDC has several programs that address stroke. Most activities are located in CDC's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention and are in collaboration with other federal agencies, state health departments, and local and tribal organizations. For more information on these programs, please see our **CDC Addresses Stroke** section.

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Page Located on the Web at <http://www.cdc.gov/Stroke/faqs.htm>

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