

What to Know About Stroke Prevention and High Blood...

 archwellhealth.com/news/what-to-know-about-stroke-prevention-and-high-blood-pressure

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Few health problems can change your life in an instant like a stroke can. Fortunately, experts say [up to 80% of strokes](#) could be prevented by healthy lifestyle choices.

We'll talk about those choices in a moment, keeping in mind that prevention is only part of the story. First, let's review the basics of a stroke, and what to do when you see the signs.

How a stroke happens

Your heart constantly pumps blood to your brain, sending it vital oxygen and nutrients. A stroke happens when a blood vessel either ruptures (bursts) or gets blocked by a blood clot. Parts of the brain that can't get blood start to die, and you can lose the bodily functions those parts control.

[A stroke can cause physical problems](#) like paralysis and sensory changes, such as loss of scent or feeling in some nerves. It can also lead to mental health problems like depression and anxiety.

Stroke is the 5th leading cause of death in the U.S. It's also a leading cause of disability.

There are three types of stroke:

- **Hemorrhagic stroke**, where a blood vessel ruptures
- **Ischemic stroke**, where a clot blocks the flow of blood; this is by far the most common type
- **Transient ischemic attack** (TIA), a "mini-stroke" where a clot temporarily blocks the flow of blood

TIAs or "mini-strokes" go away on their own — sometimes in minutes — but that doesn't mean you should ignore them. Just the opposite. They can lead to more serious strokes, so you should seek medical attention within 24 hours. When you have a TIA, your body is trying to tell you something. Listen to it.

In fact, prompt medical attention is critically important for any stroke. Remember the American Stroke Association's [F.A.S.T. acronym](#):

- **F**ace drooping
- **A**rm weakness
- **S**peech difficulty
- **T**ime to call 911

If you notice these symptoms in yourself or in someone else, act immediately and call 911. Every second counts, and it's better to be safe than risk the short- or long-term damage that hesitating or waiting may cause.

Stroke risk factors you can't control ...

People of any age, race or gender can have a stroke. However, certain factors increase your risk. Some you can't do anything about. Others are within your control.

Major risk factors you can't control include:

- **Age:** Your risk doubles every 10 years after age 55.
- **Gender:** Women face a higher stroke risk and also face a higher risk of death from stroke.
- **Race:** There are significant disparities when it comes to stroke among different populations. In terms of stroke, the risk of having one — and dying from it — is two times higher for Black people than white people. This is due to factors including higher rates of disease that contribute to stroke risk and systemic racism's effect on the [social determinants of health](#).
- **Family history:** You face a higher risk if a parent, grandparent or sibling has had a stroke.
- **Personal history:** A previous stroke or heart attack raises your risk. In fact, a TIA or “mini-stroke” raises your risk of a larger stroke by almost 10x.

... And risk factors you can

Remember when we said 80% of strokes could be prevented? Here are some risk factors you can control:

- **High blood pressure**, which puts extra strain on your arteries
- **High cholesterol**, which clogs your arteries
- **Heart disease**, which blocks blood flow
- **Diabetes**, which damages your blood vessels
- **Obesity**, which can lead to high blood pressure, diabetes and higher levels of LDL (“bad”) cholesterol

Taken together, these conditions weaken your blood vessels, make them narrower and force your heart to work harder.

Visiting your primary care provider often is a good way to help control these conditions. Discussing your blood pressure, cholesterol management, weight loss goals and more is a part of every visit with your ArchWell Health doctor.

One of the advantages of ArchWell Health's care model is that members can spend more time speaking with their provider about health conditions and general anxieties. And create a plan for reducing their risks of health concerns like stroke.

Public enemy No.1: High blood pressure

If you have several risk factors that increase your risk of stroke, you might be feeling overwhelmed. That's understandable. Consider this: high blood pressure — also known as hypertension — is the #1 controllable risk factor. Reduce your blood pressure, and you reduce your risk. What's more, by controlling your blood pressure you also lower your risk of heart attack, heart failure, kidney disease, vision loss and more.

Blood pressure measures how hard your blood is pushing against your artery walls. A blood pressure reading shows the pressure when your heart is beating — the top number, or systolic pressure — and when it's at rest — the bottom number, or diastolic pressure. Here's what the numbers mean:

- **Normal:** below 120/80 mm Hg ("120 over 80").
- **Elevated:** systolic of 120–129 mm Hg; diastolic of less than 80 mm Hg
- **High blood pressure:** systolic of 130 mm Hg or higher; diastolic of 80 mm Hg or higher

(Note: these guidelines changed in 2017, so you may occasionally see older numbers.)

The most important thing to know about high blood pressure is that you can't feel it. That's why it's often called a silent killer. And that's why primary care for older adults is so important.

Your ArchWell Health doctor will check your blood pressure at every visit. You can also monitor your blood pressure at home, although that's not a substitute for regular doctor visits. In fact, you should bring your monitor to the doctor once a year to have the results checked.

If your blood pressure is high, your ArchWell Health doctor can also help you get it under control. This could be through medication, lifestyle changes or both.

Don't let the fear of a stroke control your life. Control what you can through healthy life choices, and encourage those you love to do the same.