



Stroke Info-sheet for seniors

The risk of stroke increases with age. A stroke can occur when a blood clot blocks a blood vessel in the brain, interrupting the supply of blood and oxygen to brain cells in the area. Breaking of a blood vessel in the brain and the resultant bleeding (hemorrhaging) can also cause a stroke. In both types of stroke (clot or hemorrhage) brain cells may die, causing the parts of the body they control to stop functioning.

What are the warning signs?

The main warning signs of a stroke are:

- sudden weakness, numbness and/or tingling of the face, arm or leg;
- sudden temporary loss of speech or trouble understanding speech;
- sudden loss of vision, particularly in one eye, or double vision;
- sudden, severe, and unusual headaches; unsteadiness or sudden falls, especially with any of the above signs.

If you notice any of these signs, don't wait: phone your doctor or your health clinic.

Who is at risk?

Risk of having a stroke increases if you:

- smoke;
- have high blood pressure;
- have hardening of the arteries;
- have heart disease; or
- have diabetes.

A family history of heart problems also increases the risk of stroke.

Can stroke be prevented?

Lifestyle changes can increase your chances of avoiding stroke. High blood pressure is the most important controllable risk factor for stroke. The higher your blood pressure, the greater your risk of having a stroke. Therefore it is recommended that you have your blood pressure checked regularly.

Eat well

Eating a high fibre, low-salt and low-fat diet is effective prevention because it helps keep your blood pressure down. Salt causes water retention, which increases blood pressure. Avoid convenience foods, especially canned soups which often contain very high levels of salt. Avoid smoked, cured or corned meats. Reduce animal and dairy fat, and increase fresh fruits and vegetables in your diet. A healthy diet will also help you maintain a healthy weight.

Be active

At any age, regular, moderate physical activity can help lower or even prevent high blood pressure. Start slowly and build up. Do the activities you are doing now often. Walk wherever and whenever you can.

• Contrary to popular belief, more women than men suffer or die from stroke in their senior years.

• Being active is very safe for most people. Not sure? Consult a health professional.



Avoid alcohol and tobacco

Excessive amounts of alcohol (more than two drinks a day) can increase blood pressure and the risk of a stroke. As for smoking, not only does it make blood pressure temporarily rise with every cigarette, it also leads to arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) which also increases the risk of a stroke.

Medication

If lifestyle changes don't reduce your blood pressure enough, your doctor may prescribe medication. High blood pressure has no obvious symptoms. So, be sure to understand fully your doctor's instructions and take your medication exactly as prescribed.

Also be careful about other medications you may be taking. Many common over-the-counter remedies can increase blood pressure. Be sure to read labels carefully and tell your doctor and pharmacist about any other medication you may be taking.

What are the effects of a stroke?

When a stroke interrupts blood supply to the brain, there is injury to the affected brain cells. Strokes affect people different ways depending on the type of stroke, the area of the brain affected, and the size of the damaged area.

Common effects of stroke include: paralysis or weakness of one side of the body; vision problems; trouble using or understanding language; inability to recognize or use familiar objects; tiredness; depression; expression of emotional responses that are exaggerated or inappropriate; difficulty learning and remembering new information; changes in personality.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is an important part of recovery and should begin as soon as possible after a stroke.

While a stroke usually leaves after-effects, in many cases, the brain can learn to compensate. Rehabilitation encourages the relearning that must take place after a stroke. Understanding the effects of stroke and tailoring learning to the individual can make a big difference.

There is help for those who have suffered a stroke and those who care for them.



For more information

Contact the Heart and Stroke Foundation at 1-888-HSF-INFO for more information on preventing, recovering from and living with a stroke.

Some Internet sources of information:

www.heartandstroke.ca

www.canadian-health-network.ca

Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults

www.paguide.com/older

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