Are You at Risk for Stroke?

Everyone has some stroke risk. Risk factors are traits or life style habits that increase a person's chances of having a stroke. A few stroke risk factors cannot be changed:

- Over age 55
- Male
- African American
- Have diabetes
- Have a family history of stroke

If you have one of these risk factors, you need to learn about the life style and medical risk factors you can change or control to prevent a stroke.

**Life Style Risk Factors**

- Smoking
- Being overweight
- Drinking too much alcohol

**Medical Risk Factors**

- Previous stroke
- Previous transient ischemic attack or TIA
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Atrial fibrillation
- Carotid artery disease
Guidelines to Prevent Stroke

The National Stroke Association has guidelines to control your risk of stroke.

- **Know your blood pressure.** High blood pressure is a leading cause of stroke. If your blood pressure is high, work with your doctor to keep it under control.
  - Have your blood pressure checked at least one time each year and more often if you have a history of high blood pressure.
  - See your doctor if the higher number (your systolic blood pressure) is often over 120 or if the lower number (your diastolic blood pressure) is often over 80.

- **Find out if you have atrial fibrillation**, also called AF or atrial fib. If you have AF, work with your doctor to manage it.
  - Atrial fibrillation can cause blood to collect in the chambers of your heart. This blood can form clots and cause a stroke.
  - Your doctor can detect AF by carefully checking your pulse.

- **If you smoke or use other tobacco products, stop.** Smoking doubles the risk for stroke. If you stop smoking today, your risk for stroke will begin to decrease.

- **If you drink alcohol, limit the amount.**
  - Drinking up to two alcoholic drinks each day may lower your risk for stroke, provided that there is no other medical reason you should avoid alcohol.
  - Alcohol is a drug and it can interact with other drugs you are taking.
  - Alcohol is harmful if taken in large doses.
  - If you don't drink, don't start.

- **Know your cholesterol number.** If your level if over 200, work with your doctor to control it.
  - Lowering your cholesterol may reduce your risk for stroke.
  - High cholesterol can increase stroke risk by putting you at greater risk of heart disease.
Often high cholesterol can be controlled with diet and exercise but some people may need to take medicine.

- If you have diabetes, follow your doctor's recommendations to **control your diabetes**. Having diabetes puts you at an increased risk for stroke.

- **Include exercise in your daily routine.** A brisk walk, swim or other exercise activity for as little as 30 minutes a day can improve your health in many ways, and may reduce your risk for stroke.

- **Eat a lower sodium (salt), lower fat diet.** By cutting down on sodium and fat in your diet, you may be able to lower your blood pressure and your risk for stroke.

- **Ask your doctor if you have circulation problems.** If so, work with your doctor to control them.
  
  ▶ Fatty deposits can block the arteries that carry blood from your heart to your brain. This kind of blockage can cause stroke.
  
  ▶ Sickle cell disease, severe anemia, or other diseases can cause stroke if left untreated.

- **Call 911 if you have any stroke signs:**
  
  ▶ Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg, often on just one side of the body
  
  ▶ Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
  
  ▶ Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
  
  ▶ Sudden trouble walking
  
  ▶ Sudden dizziness or loss of balance or coordination
  
  ▶ Sudden severe headache with no known cause

If you have questions about your stroke risk, please ask your doctor or nurse.

**Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions.** You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.