

# Memory failing? You may be at higher risk for stroke

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People who experience memory loss or a decline in their thinking abilities may be at higher risk of stroke, regardless of whether they have been diagnosed with dementia, according to a new study published in the February 2, 2010, print issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

"Stroke is a leading cause of disability and death among older people, making early identification of people at high risk of stroke extremely important, so preventative measures can be taken," said study author Bernice Wiberg, MD, with Uppsala University in Sweden.

For the study, 930 men in Sweden around the age of 70 without a history of stroke participated in three mental tests. The first test, called the Trail Making Test A, measures attention and visual-motor abilities. The second, the Trail Making Test B, measures the ability to execute and modify a plan. The third, the Mini Mental State Examination, is commonly used by doctors to measure [cognitive decline](#).

During a 13-year period, 166 men developed a stroke or [transient ischemic attack](#), or TIA. Brain infarction is the most common cause of stroke and happened to 105 patients. It causes tissue damage when the proper amount of blood does not reach the brain. Hemorrhage is another kind of stroke.

The study found that people who were among the bottom 25 percent of performers on the Trail Making Test B were three times more likely to

have a stroke or a brain infarction compared to those who scored among the top 25 percent of performers on the test. The other two mental tests did not predict brain infarction or stroke.

"Our results support the idea that cognitive decline regardless of whether a person has dementia may predict risk of stroke," said Wiberg. "The Trial Making Test B is a simple and cost-effective test that, with more research, could be used to identify those persons for whom [stroke](#) prevention measures should be considered."

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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