

Take steps to prevent a stroke

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(HealthDay)—Strokes are common but not inevitable. There are ways you can reduce your risk, starting with your blood pressure.

Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in the United States and the leading cause of permanent disability, said Dr. Gary Bernardini, neurology chair at New York-Presbyterian Hospital Queens.

Most strokes occur when [blood flow](#) to the brain gets cut off. Here, Bernardini offers some stroke-prevention tips:

High [blood pressure](#) is the biggest stroke risk factor. Always monitor your [blood](#) pressure, and if it's elevated, talk to your doctor about creating a plan to lower it.

It's also smart to maintain a healthy weight and have a healthy diet. That means reducing salt intake, avoiding high-cholesterol foods, eating multiple servings of fruits and vegetables every day, and eating whole grains.

Along with weight control and [lower blood pressure](#), exercise is an independent reducer of stroke risk. Try to do moderate-intensity exercise at least five days a week, Bernardini said.

Limit or avoid alcohol consumption. More than one to two drinks a day can significantly increase your stroke risk.

If you smoke, try to quit. People who smoke have a nearly four-times increased risk of stroke, according to the World Health Organization.

Get a regular physical. Knowing your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels will give you an idea of your health and what you need to do to lower your risk of stroke.

Learn about your family history of stroke. This can help you and your doctor plan any necessary precautions.

You should also know the signs of stroke and seek immediate treatment if they occur, Bernardini emphasized.

"Strokes are a severe medical emergency, and time is of the essence for successful treatment," he said in a hospital news release. "By recognizing and quickly responding to the signs of stroke, you can potentially save your own life or the life of a family member or friend."

To identify and respond to a [stroke](#), remember the acronym FAST: facial drooping, arm weakness, speech difficulties, time to call emergency services.

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke has more on [stroke](#).

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