

5 Ways to Prevent Stroke

By now you've probably heard that when it comes to preventing stroke, making healthy lifestyle choices is key. If you quit smoking, eat a healthy diet, exercise, sleep regularly and limit alcohol, you can significantly lower your likelihood of stroke.

But while leading a healthy lifestyle is important, it's not the only way to reduce your risk. During Stroke Awareness Month this May, take charge of your health and learn five ways to help protect yourself against a brain attack:

1. **Don't ignore mini-strokes.** Transient ischemic attacks (TIAs), sometimes called "mini strokes," can cause temporary vision loss, slurred speech or weakness. Though they don't typically cause permanent damage, they may signal a problem that can lead to a full-blown stroke. About 1 in 3 people who have a TIA go on to have a stroke, often within a year, so be sure to seek medical care if you've suffered from these temporary symptoms or believe you've had a TIA.
2. **Treat diabetes and atrial fibrillation.** These conditions can cause blood clots to form if not properly managed. For people with diabetes, high blood sugar damages blood vessels over time, increasing the likelihood that clots will form inside them. People with diabetes are 2-4 times more likely to have a stroke. Atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat) can cause clots in the heart; about one in five people who suffer a stroke have A-fib. With both of these conditions, the clots can then travel to the brain, causing a stroke.
3. **Manage blood pressure and cholesterol.** High blood pressure and high cholesterol can both cause plaque build-up in your arteries, leading to heart attack or stroke. In people having a stroke for the first time, three-quarters have high blood pressure. If lifestyle changes aren't enough to keep these conditions in check, your doctor may recommend medication to control them.
4. **Consider an aspirin a day.** Don't be afraid to ask your doctor if taking aspirin or a blood thinner to prevent a stroke or heart attack is right for you. Aspirin acts as a blood thinner, preventing blood clots from forming in arteries partly blocked by cholesterol and plaque.
5. **Get screened for carotid artery disease.** A clogged carotid artery in the neck caused by the build-up of plaque is estimated to cause one-third of strokes. If you have been diagnosed with heart disease or peripheral artery disease, you are at an increased risk for carotid artery disease, too. Other risk factors include being over age 65, smoking and a family history of stroke. Early diagnosis and treatment of a narrowed carotid artery can decrease stroke risk. Your doctor can listen to the arteries in your neck with a stethoscope or refer you for a carotid ultrasound.

What do you do if you learn you have carotid artery disease? Some people can be treated with medication, while others may require surgery. Dr. Stephen C. White, M.D., FACS, RPVI offers traditional carotid artery surgery (called carotid endarterectomy, or CEA) surgery and is one of the few surgeons in the Shreveport/Bossier City area to offer a new surgical procedure called Transcarotid Artery Revascularization (TCAR) for people who are at high risk for traditional surgery. **For more information or to find out if the procedure is right for you, visit Stephen White, M.D. on the Highland Clinic webpage at highlandclinic.com or call 318-798-4484.**