

African-American Women and Stroke



African-American women are more likely to have a stroke than any other group of women in the United States. African-American women are twice as likely to have a stroke as white women. They also are more likely to have strokes at younger ages and to have more severe strokes.

These facts are alarming, but there is some good news: Up to 80% of strokes can be prevented. This means it is important to know your risk of having a stroke and taking action to reduce that risk.

What Is a Stroke?

A stroke, sometimes called a brain attack, occurs when blood flow to an area of the brain is cut off. When brain cells are starved of oxygen, they die. Stroke is a medical emergency. It's important to get treatment as soon as possible. A delay in treatment increases the risk of permanent brain damage or death.

Why Are African-American Women at Higher Risk?

- **High blood pressure**, a main risk factor for stroke, often starts at a younger age and is more severe in African-American women than in white women.
- Eating too much **salt or sodium** can raise your blood pressure, putting you at higher risk of stroke. Some researchers think African Americans may be more sensitive to the effects of salt, which in turn increases the risk for developing high blood pressure. African Americans should reduce their sodium intake to 1,500 milligrams per day.
- **Sickle cell anemia** is the most common genetic disorder in African Americans and can lead to a stroke. Strokes can occur when sickle-shaped cells block blood vessels to the brain.
- African-American women tend to have higher rates of **obesity and diabetes**, which increases the risk for high blood pressure and stroke.

As an African-American woman, you may have some of the health problems that can lead to a stroke without even knowing it.

If Stroke Happens, Act F.A.S.T.

Strokes come on suddenly and should be treated as medical emergencies. If you think you or someone else may be having a stroke, act F.A.S.T.:



F—Face:

Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?



A—Arms:

Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?



S—Speech:

Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is the speech slurred or strange?



T—Time:

If you see any of these signs, call 9-1-1 right away.

Calling an ambulance is critical because emergency medical technicians, or EMTs, can take you to a hospital that can treat stroke patients, and in some cases they can begin life-saving treatment on the way to the emergency room. Some treatments for stroke work only if given within the first 3 hours after symptoms start.



Take Steps to Prevent Stroke— You Have the Power

Almost half of African Americans have a risk factor that can lead to a stroke. Most strokes can be prevented by keeping medical conditions under control and making lifestyle changes. A good place to start is to know your **ABCS of heart health**:

- A Aspirin:** Aspirin may help reduce your risk for stroke. But you should check with your doctor before taking aspirin because it can make some types of stroke worse. Before taking aspirin, talk with your doctor about whether aspirin is right for you.
- B Blood Pressure:** Control your blood pressure.
- C Cholesterol:** Manage your cholesterol.
- S Smoking:** Quit smoking or don't start.

Make lifestyle changes:

- **Eat healthy and stay active.** Choose healthy foods most of the time, including foods with less salt, or sodium, to lower your blood pressure, and get regular exercise. Being overweight or obese raises your risk of stroke.
- **Talk to your doctor about your chances of having a stroke,** including your age and whether anyone in your family has had a stroke.
- **Get other health conditions under control,** such as diabetes or heart disease.

What Is CDC Doing About Stroke?

CDC and its partners are leading national initiatives and programs to reduce the death and disability caused by stroke and to help women live longer, healthier lives.

- CDC's [Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention](#) (DHDSP) provides resources to all 50 states to address heart disease and stroke. DHDSP and its partners work together to support efforts that reduce differences in health due to a person's ethnicity, income, or where they live.
- DHDSP supports the [WISEWOMAN](#) program that provides low-income, under-insured or uninsured women with chronic disease risk factor screening, lifestyle programs, and referral services in an effort to prevent heart disease and strokes.
- The [Paul Coverdell National Acute Stroke Program](#) funds states to measure, track, and improve the quality of care for stroke patients. The program works to reduce death and disabilities from stroke.
- The [Million Hearts](#)[®] initiative, which is co-led by CDC and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, works with other federal agencies and private sector partners to raise awareness about stroke prevention. Million Hearts[®] aims to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes by 2017.

Learn more by visiting www.cdc.gov/stroke