Preventing a Stroke

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in the United States, behind heart disease and cancer. On average, someone in the United States suffers a stroke every 45 seconds; every 3.1 minutes someone dies of a stroke. Each year, about 700,000 people suffer a stroke. About 500,000 of these are first attacks, and 200,000 are recurrent attacks.

What is a stroke?

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is suddenly interrupted or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts, spilling blood into the spaces surrounding brain cells. Brain cells die when they no longer receive oxygen and nutrients from the blood or there is sudden bleeding into or around the brain. The symptoms of a stroke include:

- Sudden numbness or weakness, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding speech
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble with walking, dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

There are two forms of stroke: *ischemic* - blockage of a blood vessel supplying the brain, and *hemorrhagic* - bleeding into or around the brain.

Stroke Prevention

Experts now believe that stroke is as preventable as heart attack. According to the National Stroke Association (NSA) [http://www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org), 80% of all strokes are preventable. The following are some ways to reduce your risk of stroke:

- **Lower Your Blood Pressure** - Eat a balanced diet, maintain a healthy weight, and exercise to reduce blood pressure. Drugs are also available.
- **Quit smoking** - Smoking cigarettes increases your risk of stroke.
- **Reduce your alcohol consumption** - Studies now show that drinking up to two alcoholic drinks per day can reduce your risk for stroke by about half.
- **Reduce Risk of Heart Disease** - Your doctor can treat your heart disease and may prescribe medication to help prevent the formation of clots.
- **Control Diabetes** - Treatment can delay complications that increase the risk of stroke.
- **Lower your Cholesterol** - High cholesterol may increase your risk of stroke.
- **Enjoy a low salt, low fat diet** - By cutting down on sodium and fat in your diet, you may be able to lower your blood pressure and, most importantly, lower your risk for stroke.
- **Transient ischemic attacks (TIAs)** - TIAs are small strokes that last only for a few minutes or hours. They should never be ignored and can be treated with drugs or surgery.

Always consult with your doctor on stroke risk factors and the best way for you to prevent a stroke.

Also visit these websites for more information:

National Stroke Association [http://www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org)