

# Controlling Your Risk Factors for Ischemic Stroke

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Ischemic strokes occur when the arteries to your brain become narrowed or blocked, causing severely reduced blood flow. A temporary decrease in blood flow to your brain causes a transient ischemic attack (TIA).

You can reduce your risk of ischemic (non-bleeding) stroke or transient ischemic attack (TIA). The best way to protect yourself from a stroke is to understand what factors increase your risk of stroke and how to control them. You can work with your doctor to treat and control many of your personal risk factors for stroke.

To view a video version of this handout visit:

<http://careguides.med.umich.edu/stroke> .Type: **stroke risks video** in the search-box and hit **Enter**. This page includes other materials approved by Michigan Medicine Stroke experts.

## What risk factors can I control?

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- High cholesterol
- Obesity
- Lack of physical activity
- Diet high in concentrated sugar and saturated fat
- Tobacco use
- High alcohol intake
- Illegal drug use

## What steps can I take to reduce my risk factors?

### 1. Control your blood pressure

High blood pressure (called hypertension) is the leading cause of stroke and the single most important controllable risk factor for stroke. Follow these steps to help control your blood pressure:

- Work with your doctor to understand your blood pressure goals.
- Measure and record your blood pressure at home.
- Get a blood pressure monitor from your doctor if you do not have one already.
- Study teaching sheet in the educational binder to learn how to take your blood pressure.

- **Talk to your doctor**

Work with your doctor to improve your control of your blood pressure.

- **Set a blood pressure target goal:**

Your doctor can provide you with a good blood pressure goal to best fit your needs. While the exact goal blood pressure to target after stroke is somewhat controversial, it is reasonable to have a target goal that is consistently around 120/80 or lower.

- **Monitor your blood pressure:**

- Measure your blood pressure at home and keep a record of your measurements.
- Your doctor can help you get a home monitor and guide you on when and how often you should take your blood pressure.
- See the attached pamphlet for detailed instructions on how to take your blood pressure or visit: <http://careguides.med.umich.edu> and type: **blood Pressure Home** in the search-box to access the material online.

- **Adjust your lifestyle to lower your blood pressure:**
  - Lose weight if overweight
  - Do regular aerobic physical activity
  - Limit alcohol intake
  - Follow a Mediterranean-type diet
  - Limit salt intake

## **2. Control Your Diabetes**

If you have diabetes, your chances of having a stroke are 1.5 times higher than in people who don't have diabetes. You can lower your chances of having a stroke by taking the following steps to manage your diabetes:

- Work with your doctor to understand your blood sugar goals.
- Measure and record your blood sugars as instructed by your doctor.

## **3. Stop Smoking**

Tobacco use damages your blood vessels. This can lead to blockages within those vessels which can cause a stroke. Follow these tips to help you stop smoking:

- Create a plan with your doctor to quit smoking.
- Avoid second-hand smoke.
- Contact the **MHealthy Tobacco Consultation Service** to learn about group and individual quit-smoking programs.
  - For more information, call: (734) 998-6222
  - Or go to the website: <http://www.mhealthy.umich.edu/tobacco>

## **4. Improve your diet**

We offer these recommendations for a healthy diet:

- Follow a Mediterranean diet.
- The Mediterranean diet emphasizes vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, poultry, fish (1-4 servings per week), legumes, olive

oil, and nuts. This diet limits the amount of sweets and red meats you can eat.

- Ask your doctor, nurse or registered dietician for help.
- Contact Michigan Medicine's **Nutrition Services Program** for individual onsite counseling as well as interactive small group workshops. To schedule an appointment:
  - Call (877) 885-8444
  - Or go to the website: <http://www.uofmhealth.org/conditions-treatments/heart-nutrition>

## 5. Exercise regularly

Regular aerobic exercise can reduce your risk of stroke by helping you lose weight, control your diabetes, lower your blood pressure, and improve your cholesterol.

- **Create a good exercise routine:**

This varies from patient to patient after stroke. Talk to your doctor about the best regimen for you.
- **If you are able to exercise independently after a stroke:**
  - Your goal is at least 3-4 sessions per week of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic physical exercise.
  - Sessions should last an average of 40 minutes.
  - Moderate intensity exercise is typically defined as sufficient to break a sweat or noticeably raise heart rate, such as walking briskly.
  - Vigorous intensity exercise includes activities such as jogging.

## 6. Limit drinking alcohol

You can reduce your risk of stroke or further stroke by limiting the amount of alcohol you drink. Follow these recommendations to attempt to eliminate or reduce your alcohol use.

- **Women:** Drink 1 alcoholic drink per day

- **Men:** Drink no more than 2 drinks per day
- Talk to your doctor if you need help reducing your alcohol intake.
- Contact MHealthy Alcohol Management Program:
  - Call: (734) 998-2017
  - Or go to the website: <http://mhealthy.umich.edu/alcohol>

## 7. Avoid use of Recreational Drugs

Intravenous (injection) drug use and cocaine use have been linked to an increased risk for stroke. Stop using these substances to reduce your risk of stroke. Talk to your doctor if you need help quitting.

**You are in charge of your health. Talk to your doctor or nurse to find out more about what you can do to prevent future strokes.**

## Where can I find more information?

If you have further questions regarding stroke care, please feel free to contact the Stroke Team at the University of Michigan Comprehensive Stroke Center at (888) 287-1082.

Comprehensive Stroke Center webpage:

<http://www.uofmhealth.org/conditions-treatments/brain-neurological-conditions/stroke>

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