Health Facts for You

UWHealth

Reducing Your Risk of Stroke

You can do things to reduce your risk of stroke in the future. Talk with your health care team about your personal risk factors for stroke and how you can control or manage them.

Things You Can Do on Your Own

Smoking and Tobacco Use



Smoking causes damage to the blood vessels and makes your blood more likely to clot.

- **Avoid** secondhand smoke.
- Quit now! You will see benefits right away. Here are resources:
  - **1-800-QUIT-NOW** (1-800-784-8669)
  - **Text READY to 200-400** for free resources
  - **WI Tobacco Quit Line** (1-879-270-7867)

Eating Habits



A healthy diet can reduce the risk of stroke and improve your health. Eating healthy doesn't have to be hard.

- Start with fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Add sources of lean protein, such as chicken and fish.
- Build in enough carbs to make the meal tasty.
- **Avoid** processed and fried foods.

Stress



Stress negatively affects other risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and weight gain.

- Managing stress is different for everyone.
- Ideas to lower stress: meditate, take a walk outside, read a book, watch TV, or talk with a friend.

Physical Activity



Being active every day helps to lower your risk of heart disease and stroke. It improves blood pressure, weight loss, and even improves mood and energy levels.

- Start by walking more. Use the stairs or park in the farthest space from the store.
- Aim for 150 minutes of walking a week or 75 minutes of jogging per week.

Healthy Weight



Extra weight makes your heart work harder and can lead to high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke.

- Losing only 5-10 pounds. can make a big difference.
- Use a food diary to keep track of what, how much, and when you eat.
- Manage portion sizes of foods you eat.
- Read nutrition labels. Lower the number of calories, sugar, saturated and trans-fat that you eat.
- Increase your daily activity.
- Ask your doctor about meeting with a dietitian.

Things to Talk About with Your Doctor

High Blood Pressure



High blood pressure is the number one cause of stroke and heart disease.

- Monitor your blood pressure at home and share readings with your doctor.
- Your top number (systolic) should be less than 130 mmHg. The bottom number (diastolic) should be less than 80 mmHg.

High Blood Sugar (Diabetes)



Too much glucose (sugar) in your blood can lead to fatty deposits or clots inside blood vessels. Clots can narrow or block blood vessels in the brain or neck.

- Hemoglobin A1C of 6.5% or more means you have diabetes.
- Your A1C result_____ %
- Talk with your team about how to manage diabetes such as diet changes, activity, and/or medicines.

Sleep Apnea



If you snore and have trouble with sleep, you may be at a higher risk of stroke and high blood pressure. Talk with your doctor about the need for a sleep study and ways to treat sleep apnea.

Atrial Fibrillation ("A-Fib")



A-fib is a type of irregular heartbeat that can cause blood to pool in the heart. It can then form a clot which can travel to the brain and cause an ischemic stroke.

- Decide on the best choice of blood thinner with your doctor and take as prescribed.
- **Do not** stop taking your blood thinner without talking to your doctor.

High Cholesterol (Atherosclerosis)



Cholesterol is a fatty substance in blood. It is made by the body and is also found in food. If there is too much cholesterol in your blood, it can clog arteries and cause an ischemic stroke.

- If you have had a stroke, your doctor may suggest that you take a statin. This is a medicine to lower your cholesterol.
- Eat a diet high in fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains such as the DASH diet.

Women's Health



Women have unique risk factors for stroke:

- Migraine with aura.
- High blood pressure during pregnancy.
- Use of hormone replacement or birth control medicines (especially if smoking).
- Women have higher rates of aneurysms than men.

Alcohol Use

Drinking is a risk factor for stroke.

- If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to no more than 1 drink (women) or 2 drinks (men) per day. Less may be safer based on your personal risks.
- Talk to your doctor about your drinking. Your medicines can be affected by alcohol.
- Seek help. There are free self-help programs, such as Alcohol Anonymous (http://www.aa.org/). There is also Al-Anon (https://al-anon.org) for family members.

Drug Use

Drugs such as cocaine, amphetamines, and heroin can cause the blood pressure to be higher. This can lead to stroke.

- It can be a hard decision to quit. You don't have to do it alone. Counseling helps people quit.
- Counseling services in your area: https://www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment or call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline: **1-800-662-HELP (4357**)
- If you need more info, please talk with your social worker or call UW Health Patient Resources at 6**08-821-4819** or **1-800-552-4255.**

My Action Plan to Prevent Stroke

Setting Goals
You may have chosen one goal or a number of goals. Don't try to reach all of your goals at once. Use this page to make a plan to help you take things step by step. Small successes will give you confidence and lead to more success!

The change I want to make is: _____

Please circle the number below that shows how important it is to you to make this change:

Not important								Very	important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

My Goal and Plan for a Healthy Change

It is easier to make a change when you set a goal and make a plan to reach it. Please fill in the blanks below and share your answers with your health care team who can support you.

My goal for next week or month is:

I will _____

This is my plan to reach my goal:

How much: _____

When: _____

How often: _____

Resources and support I will need to reach my goal: _____

_____

Things that could make it hard to reach my goal: _____

This is how I will deal with these things: _____

_____

Please circle the number below that shows how sure you are (confident) that you can reach your goal:

Not sure									Very sure
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

You are more likely to reach your goal when your confidence level is a 7 or more.
If you chose a number below 7, think about ways to change your goal or plan so you feel more sure that your plan will work and you will reach your goal.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2024 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#5736.