



# Cardiovascular Risk Factors

You can slow the progress of blood vessel disease and maybe prevent a stroke by reducing your risk factors. Risk factors are conditions, personal traits and lifestyle choices that can lead to blood vessel disease. Some risk factors are out of your control, but there are many risk factors that you can change for the better.

## Risk factors you can change or control

- + Smoking
- + High cholesterol
- + High blood pressure
- + Heart disease
- + Diabetes
- + Diet and obesity
- + Lack of exercise

## Risk factors you cannot change or control

- + Age
- + Gender
- + Race
- + Previous stroke
- + Family history of stroke or blood vessel disease

## Tobacco Use

Tobacco use is a leading cause of blood vessel disease. Smoking doubles your risk of stroke. Smoking increases the plaque in the blood vessels, makes the vessels constrict (get smaller), decreases the amount of blood and oxygen in the body, makes your heart and lungs work harder and increases your heart rate and blood pressure. Quitting is one of the most important things you can do for your health.

## Cholesterol

Your body makes cholesterol and you also get it from the food that you eat. Cholesterol is found in foods from animal sources. Cholesterol can build up in the coronary arteries and cause blockages. The best way to lower your cholesterol levels is to decrease fat (especially saturated fats) in your diet, exercise on a regular basis, and take your medications as ordered.

## High-density lipoprotein (HDL)

is considered “good cholesterol” because it prevents plaque from building up in the arteries. **Low-density lipoprotein (LDL)** is often called “bad” cholesterol because it helps plaque build up in the artery walls. **Triglycerides** provide a source of energy for the body, but at high levels can cause plaque buildup in your arteries. A lipid profile is a blood test that measures your cholesterol levels.

## Ideal levels are:

Cholesterol	150-200
Triglycerides	Below 150
HDL	Over 40
LDL	Below 100

## Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)

High blood pressure (BP) is defined as a BP of 140/90 or higher at least two times. If your BP runs above 120/74, which is ideal, there is a higher risk for stroke and artery disease, so your doctor may want your BP lower than 140/90. If you have high blood pressure, you should:

- + Lose weight
- + Limit salt in foods and drinks
- + Stop smoking
- + Reduce your stress
- + Exercise
- + Take blood pressure medication

## Heart Disease

Heart disease more than doubles your stroke risk. Changes that reduce your risk for heart disease are similar to that of stroke:

- + Don't smoke
- + Lower your cholesterol
- + Lower your blood pressure
- + Keep diabetes under control
- + Exercise

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## Diabetes

Diabetes causes changes in your blood vessels that can allow plaque to build up faster. If you have diabetes, it is important to watch your diet, take your diabetes medicine and exercise to keep your blood sugar under control.

## Diet and Obesity

Your diet can contribute to stroke, heart disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and weight problems. Eat a variety of foods following the Food Guide Plate.

## Body Mass Index (BMI)

An increased BMI puts you at risk for high blood pressure, stroke, osteoarthritis, heart disease and certain cancers. Your BMI can be calculated by using your weight and height. Any number between 17 and 25 is healthy. A BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight. A BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese.

## Exercise

Being inactive can increase your risk for stroke and heart disease. Regular exercise helps control other risk factors, such as cholesterol levels, blood pressure, blood sugar levels, and weight and stress levels. A good exercise goal would be to exercise for 30 minutes at least three to five times per week.

**Maintain an active lifestyle with regular exercise such as:**

- + Add a few steps to your day
- + Park farther away
- + Take stairs instead of elevators
- + Walk the dog

## Gender

Men have about a 30 percent higher risk of stroke than women, but stroke kills more women than men.

## Family History

Family history is a risk factor that greatly influences your chances of having a stroke or artery problems. Because you cannot change your genetic makeup, it is important to work at controlling your other risk factors, like smoking, blood sugar and blood pressure.

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