

# STROKE

Risk Factor

# ASSESSMENT



# Introduction

Strokes are the leading cause of serious, long-term disability in the US, but over 90% of strokes are preventable. That's why it's important to learn the risk factors of a stroke and take precautions to reduce your risk. By taking a stroke risk factor assessment, like the one we've put together, you can gain actionable insights into your health and prevent a stroke. Likewise, you can help a loved one understand their risks and improve their health.

In this resource, we will provide a self-assessment to help you determine your risk of stroke. Additionally, we will outline how each risk factor included on the assessment can lead to a stroke.

The following self-assessment is designed to help you determine your risk of a stroke.

On the scorecard below, circle one option (high, moderate, or low risk) for each risk factor. At the bottom of the scorecard, add up how many items are circled in each risk column.

Risk Factors	High Risk	Moderate Risk	Low Risk
<b>Blood Pressure</b>	140/90 and higher (or unknown)	120–139/80—89	Less than 120/80
<b>Cholesterol</b>	Greater than 240 (or unknown)	200–239	Less than 200
<b>Diabetes</b>	Yes	Borderline	No
<b>Smoking</b>	Yes	Trying to Quit	No
<b>Atrial Fibrillation</b>	Irregular heartbeat	Don't know	Regular heartbeat
<b>Weight</b>	Overweight by 30+ pounds	Overweight by 10–30 pounds	Healthy weight
<b>Exercise</b>	Sedentary (no exercise)	Occasional exercise	Regular exercise (at least 3 times per week)
<b>Family History of Stroke</b>	Yes	Unknown	No
<b>TOTAL</b>	Example:1	Example:4	Example:3

**HIGH RISK:**

If you circle more than 3 items in the high-risk category, then you are at a high risk of having a stroke.

**MODERATE RISK:**

If you circle more 4–6 items in the moderate-risk category, then you can work to prevent a stroke.

**LOW RISK:**

If you circle 6–8 items in the low-risk category, then you are controlling your risk for a stroke.

# A Closer Look

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Now that you've taken the Stroke Risk Assessment, let's discuss each risk factor and how it directly impacts your chance of suffering a stroke.

## BLOOD PRESSURE

High blood pressure is one of the most common risk factors of a stroke. High blood pressure, or hypertension, means that your arteries and blood vessels get hit with excess force each time your heart beats. Over time, this force can wear down your blood vessels and cause them to burst or clog easily. If this happens in a blood vessel in the brain, it cuts off the oxygen supply to the brain and causes a stroke.

High blood pressure can cause either an ischemic stroke or a hemorrhagic stroke.

- ▶ Ischemic stroke: A blood vessel in the brain is blocked by a clot
- ▶ Hemorrhagic stroke: A blood vessel in the brain bursts

### ACTION ITEM:

Measure your blood pressure. If your blood pressure falls in the moderate- or high-risk categories, then work with your doctor to lower your blood pressure.

## CHOLESTEROL

Cholesterol is a fatty substance that is carried through your blood to the rest of the body. Too much cholesterol leads to fatty deposits in your arteries, making it harder for blood to flow. Additionally, high cholesterol can increase the chance of a blood clot developing. These factors increase your chance of cutting off oxygen supply to the brain.

### ACTION ITEM:

Find out if you have high cholesterol and work with your doctor to lower it if you score in the moderate- or high-risk categories.

## DIABETES

Individuals with diabetes are 1.5 times more likely to have a stroke than someone without diabetes. Diabetes causes the body to have difficulty regulating blood sugar. Blood sugar levels can swing between high and low if diabetes is not under control. Too much sugar in the blood can lead to fat deposits in arteries and blood vessels or even clots. When this happens, a stroke can occur.

### ACTION ITEM:

If you have diabetes, work with your doctor to find a treatment plan to manage your blood sugar. This plan could include medications and lifestyle changes.

## SMOKING

There are a number of ways that smoking can increase your risk of a stroke. The toxic chemicals in cigarettes enter your bloodstream and can damage your cells. Over time, smoking can increase blood pressure and cause your arteries to narrow at a faster rate.

Cigarette smoke can also affect your cholesterol levels, causing cholesterol to rise and increasing your overall risk of a stroke. The smoke can also make your blood platelets more likely to stick together and form a clot. Additionally, cigarette smoke contains carbon monoxide, which reduces the amount of oxygen in your blood. It also contains nicotine, which raises your blood pressure and even makes the heart beat faster.

Finally, smoking can also cause atrial fibrillation, another major risk factor for strokes that we will discuss next.

### ACTION ITEM:

If you currently smoke, start taking steps to quit today.

## ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

1 in 6 strokes are caused by atrial fibrillation, which refers to an irregular heartbeat as a result of mixed electrical signals. A normal heartbeat is controlled by regular electrical signals from the brain that tell the heart to pump. When these signals are disorganized, the heart pumps chaotically. As a result, the heart can't pump blood efficiently. This may result in a blood clot that travels to the brain and causes a stroke.

### ACTION ITEM:

Measure your pulse and pay attention to any shortness of breath, fatigue, or racing heartbeat that seems out of place. You can also ask your doctor to check your heart rate for atrial fibrillation. Once diagnosed, work with your doctor on your treatment plan. You may need to take medications or undergo surgical procedures to help maintain a regular heartbeat.

## WEIGHT

Over 2/3 of Americans are obese, putting them at a high risk of stroke. The excess fatty tissue in the body can increase inflammation throughout the body, making it difficult for blood to flow freely and increasing the chance of a clot.

Obesity can also cause high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, diabetes, and other conditions that can impact blood flow and heart health.

### ACTION ITEM:

Start taking action to lose weight today. This could include exercise, diet, working with a professional, and more.

## EXERCISE

Exercise is a great way to prevent a stroke. It raises your heart rate in a healthy way and can help you regulate your blood pressure, control your weight, manage cholesterol, and even help with diabetes. Remaining sedentary, on the other hand, can cause the health of your arteries and blood vessels to slowly deteriorate and increase your risk of developing other stroke risk factors.

## ACTION ITEM:

Start exercising on a more regular basis. This could include daily walks, joining a gym, signing up for an online course, or doing other activities that get you moving.

## FAMILY HISTORY OF STROKE

Despite doing all that you can, you may not be able to prevent a stroke due to your genetics. Some genetic factors can play a role in your cholesterol, blood pressure, and other aspects of your health. You could have a predisposition to diabetes, which can increase your stroke risk.

Members of the same family are also likely to be exposed to the same environments, or the same environmental risk factors for stroke. They may also share common lifestyle habits, which can contribute to stroke risk.

If you know that your family has a history of stroke, then you can take steps to manage other risk factors and reduce your risk of a stroke.



## 1-800-SENIOR CARE

We hope that this self-assessment can help you take control of your health and identify any areas that need to change to reduce your risk of stroke. If you or your loved one are a stroke risk or are recovering from a stroke, call caring senior service for a free in-home care assessment.

### REFERENCES:

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