



Loss Control Insight

Are You at Risk for a Stroke

A stroke occurs when the blood supply to part of your brain is interrupted or reduced, depriving brain tissue of oxygen and nutrients. Within minutes, brain cells begin to die. A stroke is a medical emergency. Prompt treatment is crucial. Early action can minimize brain damage and potential complications.

Symptoms

Watch for these signs and symptoms if you think you or someone else may be having a stroke. Pay attention to when the signs and symptoms begin. The length of time they have been present can affect your treatment options:

- **Trouble with speaking and understanding.** You may experience confusion. You may slur your words or have difficulty understanding speech.
- **Paralysis or numbness of the face, arm or leg.** You may develop sudden numbness, weakness or paralysis in your face, arm or leg. This often happens just on one side of your body. Try to raise both your arms over your head at the same time. If one arm begins to fall, you may be having a stroke. Also, one side of your mouth may droop when you try to smile.
- **Trouble with seeing in one or both eyes.** You may suddenly have blurred or blackened vision in one or both eyes, or you may see double.
- **Headache.** A sudden, severe headache, which may be accompanied by vomiting, dizziness or altered consciousness, may indicate you're having a stroke.
- **Trouble with walking.** You may stumble or experience sudden dizziness, loss of balance or loss of coordination.

Seek immediate medical attention if you notice any signs or symptoms of a stroke, even if they seem to fluctuate or disappear. Think "FAST" and do the following:

- **Face.** Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?
- **Arms.** Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward? Or is one arm unable to rise up?
- **Speech.** Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is his or her speech slurred or strange?
- **Time.** If you observe any of these signs, call 911 immediately.

Risk factors

Lifestyle risk factors

- Being overweight or obese
- Physical inactivity
- Heavy or binge drinking
- Use of illicit drugs such as cocaine and methamphetamines

Medical risk factors

- Blood pressure readings higher than 120/80 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg)
- Cigarette smoking or exposure to secondhand smoke
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Obstructive sleep apnea
- Cardiovascular disease, including heart failure, heart defects, heart infection or abnormal heart rhythm
- Personal or family history of stroke, heart attack or transient ischemic attack.

Knowing your stroke risk factors, following your doctor's recommendations and adopting a healthy lifestyle are the best steps you can take to prevent a stroke. Remember the longer a stroke goes untreated, the greater the potential for brain damage and disability.