

What puts people at risk of stroke?

Stroke RISK factors, especially in combination, make a stroke more likely:

Things that you can do something about:

- Smoking cigarettes
- Diet high in saturated fat (fat that is solid at room temperature, eg, butter)
- Diet high in salt
- Diet low in fresh fruit and vegetables
- Heavy alcohol consumption
- Not enough exercise
- Overweight.

Things that cannot be changed:

- Older age
- Being male
- Previous stroke
- Diabetes
- Previous heart disease
- Born with heart defect or weak artery wall
- Family history.

Medical conditions that can be controlled with treatment:

- Raised blood pressure (hypertension)
- An irregular heart rhythm called atrial fibrillation that makes clotting more likely within the heart itself
- Abnormality in blood fats, eg, cholesterol (dyslipidaemia).

Some factors, for example smoking and high blood pressure, carry a greater risk than others.

- If you smoke, or have high blood pressure, your risk of stroke increases approximately **x 5** (you are 5 times more likely to have a stroke than someone of the same age and sex who does not smoke and has normal blood pressure).

When two or more factors are present, the risk multiplies. For example:

- Smoking + high blood pressure = risk at least **x 18**
- Smoking + high blood pressure + one other factor will increase the risk significantly more.
- If you have four or more risk factors you are at **very high risk of stroke!**

Getting rid of even one risk factor will significantly reduce your chance of having a stroke over the next few years.

For guidelines on preventing stroke, [see page 165](#).