

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, e.g. 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 (not hereditary, but risk factors are, and modifiable)

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, e.g. 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 five** (you are five 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](#).