Women’s Guide to Preventing Stroke
About 80% of strokes are preventable through taking good care of yourself. Now is the time to start!

A stroke can cause death, and women who survive a stroke can have disabilities that change their daily lives. Recovering from a stroke can take several months. Even then, problems with speech, dressing, bathing or many other daily tasks can last.

Think about your family, your friends and your community — people who love and depend on you to stay healthy. You can take steps now to prevent a stroke and live a long, healthy life.
What is a stroke?

Similar to a heart attack, a stroke is a sudden attack in the brain. Stroke happens when a blood vessel in the brain bursts or is blocked, preventing blood from reaching areas of the brain. Without blood, the cells in that part of the brain start to die.

When brain cells die, the brain weakens. Different parts of the brain control different parts of your body, so you might lose the ability to walk, talk or move your arms. That’s why it is so important to get to a hospital as soon as possible if you are having a stroke.

Time is important! **Get an ambulance to take you to the hospital.** You can start getting treated right away in the ambulance. The faster you get treated, the more likely you will survive and get well.
Signs of stroke

Learning and remembering the signs of stroke will help you or a loved one get fast treatment. Stroke usually comes quickly and without warning.

Watch this 30-second video to help you remember the BE FAST signs of stroke.

- **BALANCE**: Did they suddenly lose balance or coordination?
- **EYES**: Do they have sudden blurred or double vision, or loss of vision in one or both eyes?
- **FACE**: Ask them to smile. Does one side of the face droop?
- **ARM**: Ask them to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- **SPEECH**: Ask them to repeat a simple sentence. Are the words slurred? Can they repeat the sentence correctly?
- **TIME**: If they show any of these symptoms, time is important. **Call 911**

If you **suddenly** have any one of these BE FAST symptoms, call **911 immediately**.
Women and stroke by the numbers

Any woman can have a stroke, but some women are more likely to have a stroke than others.

1st
Stroke is the leading cause of disability in the U.S.

2X
Black and Latina women are twice as likely as white women to have a stroke due to past and current social inequities.

3rd
Stroke is the 3rd leading cause of death for women.

1 in 5
Women in the U.S. ages 55–75 will have a stroke.

80%
of strokes can be prevented by taking care of your health.
Are you at risk for a stroke?

If you have any of these conditions, talk to your health care provider about your risk of stroke.

In addition to age, race and sex, some factors that can raise your risk of stroke include:

**Family history:** If your grandparent, parent, brother or sister had a stroke, there may be a higher risk that stroke runs in the family.

**Other health conditions,** such as:
- Atrial fibrillation (A-fib)
- Autoimmune disease
- Coronary artery disease
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Peripheral artery disease
- Sickle cell disease

**Problems in pregnancy:** If you have ever had high blood pressure or diabetes during a pregnancy, you may have a higher risk for stroke.

**Hormone therapy:** Some types of pills to prevent pregnancy or to help with menopause can also increase stroke risk.

**Migraines:** Women have more of these severe headaches than men. If you have the kind of migraine where it changes your vision before the headache starts, you may have a much higher risk of stroke than other women.

**COVID-19:** A bad case of COVID-19 can make a stroke more likely, even after the virus symptoms go away. A good way to avoid a severe COVID-19 infection is to get vaccinated as soon as you can.

Young women and stroke

Women younger than 40 years old may not think about their risk of stroke. But young women do have strokes, and they have more of them than men their same age. It’s important for women of all ages to know the signs of stroke and to call 911 for help right away.
You can help prevent a stroke

80% of strokes are preventable, so start taking small steps today for better health!

Keep your blood pressure at a healthy level

High blood pressure (hypertension) is the number one cause of stroke. It is so common, about half of all American adults will have high blood pressure at some point in their lives. It is sometimes called “the silent killer,” because most people don’t feel any warning signs that their blood pressure is high. That’s why it is very important to have regular check-ups with your health care provider, to know your blood pressure numbers and to check them often. You can also buy digital blood pressure cuffs to check yourself at home.

The goal is to keep your blood pressure at 120/80 or lower. The first number (120) measures the pressure when your heart beats. The second number (80) measures the pressure when your heart rests. When these numbers get higher, it shows that your heart is having to work harder.

A blood pressure of more than 130 for the first number may require treatment to bring it down. To lower high blood pressure, your provider may give you medicine and suggest healthy lifestyle changes.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>High blood pressure increases your risk of stroke.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="heart.png" alt="Heart" /> Normal blood pressure is below 120/80.</td>
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<tr>
<td>🚫 High blood pressure is 130/80 or higher.</td>
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<tr>
<td>⚪ More than 1 in 3 U.S. adults don’t know they have high blood pressure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>🟢 Have your blood pressure checked to REDUCE your risk of stroke.</td>
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Stop smoking

There are many helpful tools to support your decision to quit smoking and stick with it. Ask your provider for information, programs and medications to help you quit. We’ve also listed some resources at the end of this guide.

Keep a healthy weight

Being overweight can double your risk of stroke, even if you are young. That is why it is important to maintain a healthy weight. Your provider can help you determine what a healthy weight range is for you. If you aren’t in that range yet, change your diet, exercise and sleep better to help you lose weight. Your provider can suggest some resources.

Eat healthy

Women are often the meal planners and providers in their families. This is an important role for the whole family’s health. Learn about what foods are good and bad for your body in what amounts. As you learn about healthy diets, you might not be used to cooking or eating these types of food. Your health care team can help you work with a nutrition specialist at OHSU Health. They can help you make a new eating plan that will help your general health.

Healthy eating tips

- Eat more fruit, vegetables, whole-grains and beans
- Eat less meat; choose healthier options like poultry and fish
- Avoid foods high in fat, salt or sugar
- Bake, broil, roast and boil foods instead of frying
- Learn to read nutrition labels to watch for fat, salt and sugar
- Lower the amount of salt you eat by choosing fresh or frozen food instead of canned
- Use healthier fats, like olive oil instead of lard or butter
- Limit alcohol to one drink a day for women
Move your body

Physical activity helps keep your body healthy. But many people get little or no activity other than walking around at home or work. You should exercise, even if you aren’t overweight. Keep your muscles moving and blood flowing to help your heart, body and mind. If you have not been doing any physical activity, start with 30 minutes just three times a week. Build up to five days a week.

Take your medicine the right way

If you have a health condition like high blood pressure or heart disease, be sure to follow your provider’s instructions about medicine. Read the pill labels to know how much and how often you should take the medicine. If you have diabetes, follow the routines to keep your blood sugar under control.

Manage your stress

Stress can trigger some of the things that lead to stroke, like high blood pressure. Stress takes a toll on your body and mind. You can’t avoid all stress, so learn ways to cope. If your stress level is high and stays high, talk to your provider about it. For everyday stressors, try these ideas:

- Exercise
- Meditate
- Take deep breaths
- Practice yoga or tai chi
- Spend time in nature
- Walk and play with your pet
- Use a calming app
Common questions about stroke

**If I think I’m having a stroke, should I call my doctor?**

No, call 911. Do not drive yourself to the hospital. If you are with someone who is having a stroke, also call 911 rather than drive to the hospital.

**Isn’t it risky to go to the hospital with COVID-19 and other germs?**

Stroke kills parts of the brain. This can lead to death or disability. Getting care quickly is the most important thing. OHSU Health hospitals take all the care possible to keep patients healthy. This includes wearing masks, deep-cleaning often and limiting visitors.

**What happens when brain cells die in a stroke?**

Depending on where the stroke happens in the brain, different parts of the body can become disabled. When brain cells die, you might lose your speech, movement of different body parts, or your memory.

**Do strokes affect everyone the same way?**

No. Some people have mild strokes and some people have serious strokes that cause more damage in the brain, or even death. A stroke can happen in different parts of the brain causing different types of disability.

**Aren’t strokes only an issue for older people?**

Most strokes occur in people over 65 years old, but anyone can have a stroke, even children.

**Are strokes painful?**

Some people get a painful headache, but most of the signs of stroke don’t cause pain. This can make people ignore the signs.

**Why do women have more strokes than men?**

One simple reason is that women often live longer than men. Since stroke is more common as you age, women are more likely to have one. Women also have some risk factors that men don’t, like pregnancy and taking birth control pills.
Why do Black and Latina women have more strokes?

For decades, social inequities in the U.S. have made it hard for Black and Latina women to be as healthy as possible. Black and Latina women are more likely to have high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and a family history of stroke. Both Black and Latina women may have less access to medical care and wellness programs. They often have unequal access to healthy foods, so their diets may be high in salt and fat. For Black women, sickle cell disease may also be an issue.

Can you recover from a stroke?

Getting to an emergency room as quickly as possible can make a big difference in recovering from stroke. But there are different types of stroke. Some are worse and do more damage than others. Age and other health issues also impact recovery.

Is a TIA the same thing as a stroke?

A transient ischemic attack (TIA) is a mini-version of a full stroke. It is a warning sign that needs action. The symptoms of TIA are the same as a stroke, but last for less time. So even if signs come and go quickly, call 911.
Top care when and where you need it

OHSU Health provides 24/7 expert emergency stroke care. Our three hospitals are located throughout the metro area, right where you need us.

**Hillsboro Medical Center**, a primary stroke center, and **Adventist Health Portland** in East Portland, provide emergency care for most types of stroke.

OHSU Hospital on Marquam Hill above downtown Portland was Oregon’s first comprehensive stroke program. We are a national leader, providing the latest treatment for all types of stroke, including the most complex. [Learn more](#).
Health care resources

If you have a family health care provider, make an appointment to talk about your risk of stroke and how to prevent one.

If you don’t have a health care provider or insurance, here’s a list of community health clinics in the Portland metro area:

**Clackamas County Health Centers**  
Beavercreek, Gladstone, Clackamas, Sandy  
503-655-8471  
[website](#)

**Mercy and Wisdom Community Health Clinic**  
Southeast Portland  
503-227-1222  
[website](#)

**Multnomah County Primary Care Clinics**  
Gresham, Southeast Portland, North Portland, Northeast Portland and La Clinica de Buena Salud, Northeast Portland  
503-988-5558  
[website](#)

**National University of Natural Medicine**  
Southwest Portland  
503-552-1551  
[website](#)

**Native American Rehabilitation Health Clinics**  
North Portland: 503-230-9875  
East Portland: 971-279-2051  
[website](#)

**Neighborhood Health Centers**  
Beaverton: 503-213-3800  
Canby: 503-416-4547  
Hillsboro: 503-848-5861  
Milwaukie: 503-416-1960  
Oregon City: 503-656-9030  
[website](#)
North by Northeast Community Health Center
Northeast Portland
503-287-4932
[website]

OHSU Primary Care at Richmond
Southeast Portland
503-418-3900
[website]

Outside In
Downtown Portland, East Portland, Clackamas
503-535-3860
[website]

Prism Health
Southeast Portland
503-445-7699
[website]

Rosewood Family Health Center
Southeast Portland
503-772-4335
[website]

Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Clinics
Beaverton: 503-352-6000
Hillsboro: 503-601-7400
Cornelius: 503-359-5564
Newberg: 971-281-3000
McMinnville: 503-472-1338
Women’s Health Clinic, Hillsboro: 503-359-5564
[website]

Wallace
Southeast Portland
503-489-1760
[website]
Stop smoking programs

Oregon Tobacco Quit Line
1-800-QUIT-NOW
[website](#)

American Cancer Society
1-800-227-2345
[website](#)

Native American Rehabilitation Association
North Portland: 503-230-9875
East Portland: 971-279-4800
[website](#)
OHSU accepts most health plans.
OHSU is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution.