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## *Are You At Risk For Having A Stroke?*

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A risk factor is something in your physical condition, family history or lifestyle that increases your chances of developing an illness, such as a stroke. Many of the risk factors for stroke and heart diseases are the same. Having more than one risk factor increases your chance of having a stroke. There are two general types of factors for stroke—risk factors you can't change (**uncontrollable**) and those that you can do something about (**controllable**).

**Uncontrollable** risk factors include the following:

- **Age:** greater than 65 years.
- **Gender:** men have a higher risk than women of having a stroke.
- **Ethnicity:** individuals of First Nations/Aboriginal Peoples, African, Hispanic, South Asian and Black descent
- **Family History:** parent or sibling with a stroke before the age of 65.
- **Prior Stroke or Transient Ischemic Attack** (a TIA or "mini-stroke")

**Controllable** risk factors are things **you** can do something about!

- **High blood pressure (hypertension):** is the single most important controllable risk factor for stroke, medications can help to control high blood pressure.
- **Diabetes:** compared to people without diabetes, diabetics are 2 to 4 times at greater risk for stroke so it is important to discuss with your doctor the available treatment options to control your diabetes.
- **Smoking:** this doubles your risk for having a stroke—Stop smoking!
- **Heart Disease/Atrial Fibrillation:** having either of these can increase your risk for stroke, it is important to discuss these conditions with you doctor.
- **High blood cholesterol:** high levels of blood cholesterol contributes to the development of plaque along the walls of the blood vessels ("hardening of the arteries") which increases the risk of stroke. Diet and medication can help to reduce your risk if your cholesterol levels are high.
- **Inactivity and unhealthy eating habits:** staying active and eating a low-fat diet with lots of fruit, vegetables and whole grains to maintain a healthy weight can help to reduce your risk of stroke (those who are inactive are at twice the risk for heart disease and stroke).
- **Excessive alcohol consumption:** if you drink, do so in moderation (no more than 1 to 2 drinks a day)
- **Risk factors unique to women** (use of oral contraceptives & hormone replacement therapy): each woman is unique and should discuss the risk associated with her doctor regarding either of these medications.

***Talk to your family doctor if you have concerns regarding any of the risk factors above.***

Contact the **Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada**  
for more information at:  
Phone: (613) 569-4361 OR [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca)

Also see the **American Heart Association and the Stroke Association**  
websites at:  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)  
[www.strokeassociation.org](http://www.strokeassociation.org)

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