

# It's not a stroke of luck

By Suze Hargraves

According to the American Heart Association, stroke is described as “when a blood vessel that carries oxygen and nutrients to the brain is either blocked by a clot or bursts. When that happens, part of the brain cannot get the blood (and oxygen) it needs, so it starts to die.” The effects of stroke are often devastating and can include paralysis on one side of the body (depending on the location of the obstruction and how badly the brain is affected), vision problems, behavioral changes, memory loss and speech and language problems.

I don't know about you but none of that sounds good to me. My brain needs all the oxygen it can get and I, for one, intend on doing everything in my power to make sure it remains well supplied. I've got enough trouble without coffee, much less a serious and life-threatening lack of blood supply to my brain. Let's start at the beginning and understand what stroke is and why it happens. It's difficult to choose a correct preventative path until you've got at least got a handle on the basics of what it is you're trying to prevent.

There are two types of stroke; ischemic and hemorrhagic. In an ischemic stroke, also called “cerebral infarction”, the vessel clogs as a result of fatty deposits building up in the vessel wall. About 80% of strokes are ischemic in nature. Transient ischemic stroke (TIA) is what people commonly refer to as “mini strokes”. According to The American Stroke Association, “Recognizing and treating TIAs can reduce your risk of a major stroke. The usual TIA symptoms are the same as those of stroke, only temporary. The short duration of these symptoms and lack of permanent brain injury is the main difference between TIA and stroke.” In a hemorrhagic stroke the vessel ruptures and blood leaks into the brain. This is basic information. There's much more to know about the medical mechanics of stroke but far too much to present here. You can visit [www.strokeassociation.org](http://www.strokeassociation.org) to get a more complete picture or, better yet, talk to your healthcare provider.

Now that we've got a feel for the basics, the next question is how can we prevent stroke? Some risk factors can't be changed such as hereditary conditions and sex and age. AHA 2009 statistics report, “Men's stroke incidence rates are greater than women's at younger ages but not at older ages. 55,000 more women die of stroke each year than men.” There are however many risk factors we can actively manage. High blood pressure, smoking, diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol, obesity and a penchant for being a couch potato are all things we can take action against with just three simple tools. Diet and exercise are the first two tools. Common sense is the third: **You need to make choices each and every day that are going to have healthy results. It's your responsibility to yourself and to those that love you.** If you would like a good start on making heart healthy choices visit the American Heart Association's website at [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org).

There's one last piece of information every living human being needs to know: The Warning Signs of a Stroke. Straight from the American Heart Association here are 5 signs you need to post in your home and business. If you or a person you are with experiences any of these symptoms, call 9-1-1 immediately! **SUDDEN NUMBNESS OR WEAKNESS OF THE FACE, ARM OR LEG ESPECIALLY ON ONE SIDE OF THE BODY, SUDDEN CONFUSION, TROUBLE SPEAKING OR UNDERSTANDING, SUDDEN TROUBLE SEEING IN ONE OR BOTH EYES, SUDDEN TROUBLE WALKING, DIZZINESS, LOSS OF BALANCE OR COORDINATION, SUDDEN SEVERE HEADACHE WITH NO KNOWN CAUSE.**

Stroke prevention is not a stroke of luck. It's a stroke of genius.

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