



Best Doctors® REPORT

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IN THIS ISSUE

- p.1 A Word from Best Doctors
- p.1 What is a Stroke?
- p.2 Effects of a Stroke
- p.2 Stroke Prevention
- p.2 How Best Doctors Can Help

The risk factors for stroke include those we can control and those we can't. We certainly have no control over age, gender, ethnicity and family history. But we do have control over health issues like high blood pressure, stress, smoking and physical inactivity.

By making lifestyle changes, we can help reduce our chances of this disease. Increased awareness coupled with advances in medical treatment means more Canadians are surviving strokes. Consulting with a physician can help determine your risk of stroke and identify what you can do to minimize your chances of suffering from one.

A Word from Best Doctors

It's the third leading cause of death in Canada and the second leading cause of death worldwide.¹ A major contributor to disability, stroke takes an enormous toll on individuals, families and society while costing our economy billions every year in physician services, hospital costs, lost wages and decreased productivity.

World Stroke Day is on October 29th, bringing into focus a condition from which 15 million people worldwide suffer each year, according to the World Health Organization.² In Canada, a stroke occurs every 10 minutes and 315,000 people live with the effects of stroke, but the impact extends well beyond the person who has suffered. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada estimates that 1 out of every 2 Canadians has been touched in some way by stroke. A staggering 60 percent of people who have a stroke report they need help afterwards.³

1 Statistics Canada, 2011. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2014001/article/11896-eng.htm>

2 <http://www.strokecenter.org/patients/about-stroke/stroke-statistics/>

3 <http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=ikiQLcMWJtE&b=7498307&ct=13158031>

FACTS:

- Stroke takes the lives of over 14,000 Canadians every year.
- For each hour in which treatment for stroke does not occur, the brain loses as many neurons as it does in almost 3.6 years of normal aging.
- For every minute delay in treating a stroke, the average patient loses 1.9 million brain cells.

*Source: The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada
<http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.ikiQLcMWJtE/b.3483991/k.34A8/Statistics.htm>

What is a Stroke?

On the most basic level, a stroke is a sudden loss of brain function. There are two types of strokes: ischemic and hemorrhagic.

An **ischemic stroke** occurs when there's an interruption of blood flow to the brain. A **hemorrhagic stroke** refers to a rupture of blood vessels in the brain. In either case, brain cells (neurons) in the affected area die. The effects of a stroke vary widely depending on where the brain was injured and the extent of the damage.

A "mini stroke" (or transient ischemic attack) can also occur when clots prevent blood from flowing to the brain for a short period of time.

A stroke can happen to anyone, including babies and children. While age is certainly a risk factor for stroke, an increasing number of young people are also being affected. In Canada, 200 to 300 children each year experience a stroke, according to the Canadian Stroke Network.⁴ When it comes to risk factors, young people with high blood pressure, diabetes and bulging waistlines are especially susceptible.

4 <http://ontariostrokenetwork.ca/blog/know-facts-stroke/>



Effects of a Stroke

Our brain is the command centre for all our functions, so the potential effects of a stroke are wide-ranging. A stroke can impact our ability to see, speak, move, remember, read and write, and reason.

Effects of a RIGHT hemisphere stroke include:

- Weakness or paralysis on the left side of the body
- Vision problems
- Short-term memory loss
- Lapses in judgment (for example, acting impulsively)
- Problems distinguishing distance, depth, or between up and down or front and back.

Effects of a LEFT hemisphere stroke include:

- Weakness or paralysis on the right side of the body
- Difficulty reading, thinking, speaking or doing math
- Behaviour that is more cautious than usual
- Trouble learning or remembering new information

Strokes in the cerebellum and brain stem are less common, but the consequences can be severe and even fatal. A stroke in the cerebellum can result in an inability to walk and difficulty with co-ordination and balance, dizziness, headaches, nausea and vomiting.

Strokes in the brain stem (the area at the base of the brain, right above the spinal cord) are usually fatal. A person who survives this type of stroke may have problems with breathing, heart function, body temperature control, vision, speaking, chewing and swallowing, balance and coordination as well as weakness/paralysis on both sides of the body.

Recognizing the Signs

The odds of surviving and recovering from a stroke can be greatly improved if you are able to recognize and immediately respond to the signs of a stroke by calling 911.

Five main warning signs of stroke include:

- 1) Weakness:** Sudden numbness in the face, arm or leg, or sudden weakness
- 2) Difficulty speaking:** Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding (even if it's temporary)
- 3) Vision problems:** Sudden vision difficulty (even if temporary)
- 4) Headache:** A severe and unusual headache that comes on suddenly
- 5) Dizziness:** Sudden loss of balance

*Source: The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada.

Stroke prevention

While strokes can be devastating, the good news is that 80 percent of all strokes are preventable.⁵ The key to prevention is managing risk factors and adopting lifestyle changes. For instance, be sure to have your blood pressure checked regularly as high blood pressure is the number one risk factor for stroke. If you are diagnosed with high blood pressure, you can then take steps to control it through diet, exercise, and being smoke-free.

High blood cholesterol is another risk factor. Lowering your cholesterol can have a huge impact on reducing your chance of stroke. To get your cholesterol under control, try reducing your fat intake (particularly saturated fat), avoid trans fats (found in many processed foods and fast foods), choose "healthy" fats found in vegetables, fish and nuts, and be sure to get regular exercise.

Stress, physical inactivity and excessive alcohol consumption are other risk factors that are also under your control.

⁵ American Stroke Association. http://www.strokeassociation.org/STROKE-ORG/AboutStroke/Treatment/Stroke-Treatments_UCM_310892_Article.jsp

How Best Doctors Can Help

More Canadians these days are surviving strokes thanks to both increased awareness and advances in medical treatment. It's critical to identify risk factors and manage them, which means getting a proper diagnosis if you suspect you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol so that you can prevent a stroke from occurring in the first place. If you are at high risk for stroke and you need help figuring out how to best manage your health, Best Doctors can help by providing resources and information. And if you or a loved one does suffer a stroke, there are several medical treatments available that can minimize any long-term effects and even prevent death. The key is being able to recognize the warning signs of stroke so that you can get immediate medical attention.



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