

Editorial Note on Stroke

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Stroke ranks as the fourth leading killer in the United States. A stroke can be devastating to individuals and their families, robbing them of their independence. It is the most common cause of adult disability. Each year approximately 795,000 Americans have a stroke, with about 160,000 dying from stroke-related causes. Officials at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) are committed to reducing that burden through biomedical research.

A stroke, or "brain attack," occurs when not enough blood is circulated or reaching to the brain. Brain cells can die from decreased blood flow and the resulting lack of oxygen. There are two broad categories of stroke: those caused by a blockage of blood flow and those caused by bleeding into the brain. A blockage of a blood vessel in the brain or neck, called an ischemic stroke, is the most frequent cause of stroke and is responsible for about 80 percent of strokes. These blockages stem from three conditions: the formation of a clot within a blood vessel of the brain or neck, called thrombosis; the movement of a clot from another part of the body such as the heart to the brain, called embolism; or a severe narrowing of an artery in or leading to the brain, called stenosis.

Bleeding into the brain or the spaces surrounding the brain causes the second type of stroke, called haemorrhagic stroke.

The Two key steps to prevent or lower the risk of death or disability is to control stroke's risk factors and know stroke's warning signs. Scientific research conducted by the NINDS has identified warning signs and a large number of risk factors. The major risk factors for stroke include age, gender, race and family history of stroke and other treatable risk factors include High blood pressure or hypertension, Cigarette smoking, Heart disease, Diabetes, cholesterol intolerance, physical inactivity and obesity.

Many risk factors for stroke can be managed, some very successfully. Although risk is never zero at any age, by starting early and controlling your risk factors you can lower your risk of death or disability from stroke. With good control, the risk of stroke in most age groups can be kept below that for accidental injury or death.

In recent years, a better understanding of the causes of stroke has helped many make lifestyle changes that have cut the stroke death rate nearly in half. Scientists at the NINDS predict that, with continued attention to reducing the risks of stroke and by using currently available therapies and developing new ones, 80 percent of all strokes can be prevented.

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