

Now is a good time to start changing your lifestyle, if you haven't already. It's also a good opportunity to ask your doctor to check your blood pressure if you haven't done so recently.

To contact the Stroke Recovery Association, a support group for people who have had a stroke and their families, call (02) 9550 0594. The Association has a number of clubs in different areas, some with members from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.



English
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PREVENTING STROKE: IS IT TIME TO CHANGE YOUR LIFESTYLE?

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Preventing Stroke: Is it Time to Change Your Lifestyle

A stroke is a similar disease to a heart attack, except that it involves the brain instead of the heart. In both situations the problem happens when an artery becomes blocked. If this happens to an artery leading to the heart, the result is a heart attack, but if it happens to an artery leading to the brain, the result is a sudden injury to the brain which may temporarily or permanently affect thinking, speech movement and the senses.

As with heart disease, there's a lot we can do to reduce the risk of having a stroke. According to the Australian Brain Foundation, changing habits can help prevent this often devastating condition which affects 37,000 people in Australia each year. One third of these people die within three months and many more are permanently disabled.

Here are some tips on how to lower the risk.

Eating to help prevent a stroke

Enjoying a diet that includes plenty of wholegrain bread, pasta, rice and other grains, a variety of vegetables and fruits- but eating less fat- helps prevent stroke in two ways. Cutting down on fat- for example trimming fat from meat, fat and skin from poultry, using low-fat dairy products, using only a little butter, margarine and oil and avoiding too many fatty snack foods and take-away foods- helps reduce cholesterol in your blood. Cholesterol is the substance which can clog arteries and contribute to blockages in them. Eating less fat also makes it

easier to maintain a healthy weight- overweight people are more likely to have high blood pressure which increases the risk of stroke.

Avoiding too much salt helps as well. Eating a lot of salt can increase blood pressure in some people. Good ways to eat less include substituting the salt you normally add to food (either at the table or when you cook) with other flavourings- your favourite herbs and spices, for instance, or extra garlic and ginger, or a splash of lemon juice. Using fresh vegetables with strong flavours also helps. Remember that a lot of foods you buy in the supermarket- including cheeses, butter, margarine, meats such as ham and salamis and many canned foods- already contain salt. Look for brands which have the words "no added salt" or "reduced salt" on the label.

Regular exercise

Besides making you feel and look better, ½ an hour of walking a day can help reduce blood pressure and maintain a healthy weight. Physically active people are less likely to develop high blood pressure or heart and artery disease. This may also be because exercise and activity can help reduce stress - some doctors believe that too much stress can also increase the risk of high blood pressure.

Quit smoking

This can add years to your life. Smoking is one of the main risk factors for both stroke and heart disease.

Be Careful with Alcohol and Medication.

Binge drinking and excessive drinking will increase blood pressure. Some drugs such as those for hayfever, colds and other minor problems may also cause blood pressure to rise - ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.