

## EAT HEALTHY FOODS

A healthy balanced diet includes lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, grains, and a moderate amount of lean meat or low fat protein. It also includes low fat dairy foods, soy or legume products.

Each day try to eat fruit, vegetables and legumes of different colours. Fruit and vegetables contain antioxidant vitamins and potassium, both good for the arteries. Fibre, such as in cereals, whole grain bread, beans, peas, nuts and seeds, helps reduce cholesterol. Dairy products such as low fat milk, yoghurt and cheese contain both protein (to help growth and repair of our bodies) and calcium (to help keep bones strong).

Cut down on fatty, salty, sugary foods and drinks.

## BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

Regular exercise will help to maintain a healthy blood pressure. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate exercise (enough to make you slightly warm and a little out of breath) on most days of the week. Any regular physical activity is good – and it can halve your stroke risk!

## MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT

Too much body fat can lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol and type 2 diabetes – all risk factors for stroke. A sedentary lifestyle increases the likelihood of becoming overweight or obese. A good balance between healthy eating and regular exercise can help you keep a healthy weight. If you find it hard to control your weight, ask your doctor or nutritionist for help.

## LIMIT YOUR ALCOHOL INTAKE

Drinking more than two small alcoholic drinks a day can increase stroke risk by up to three times. A drinking binge can increase stroke risk as much as five times, regardless of age. Regular heavy drinking can lead to stroke because it can raise blood pressure and cause a brain haemorrhage (bleeding).

Limiting the amount of alcohol you drink is an important way to reduce stroke risk.

## LOWER YOUR CHOLESTEROL LEVEL

High blood cholesterol can contribute to atherosclerosis (narrowing of the arteries) which can lead to stroke. To reduce cholesterol, choose foods low in saturated fat. Choose lean meat and low fat dairy products, and boost your intake of high fibre foods, e.g. cereals and wholegrain bread. Check your cholesterol level by having a blood test. Your doctor may prescribe medication to lower cholesterol but a healthy diet and regular exercise are still important.

## GET CHECKED FOR ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is a type of irregular heartbeat and is a risk factor for stroke. With AF, the blood can 'pool' in parts of the heart and form blood clots. A clot can travel through the blood vessels to the brain where it can block an artery and cause a stroke. Symptoms of AF can be palpitations, weakness or breathlessness, but some people have no symptoms. If you suspect you have AF it is important to get checked by your doctor. Treatment for AF will reduce your risk of stroke.



## IF YOU HAVE DIABETES, MANAGE YOUR CONDITION WELL

Diabetes is a condition where the body is unable to utilize blood sugar. High blood sugar levels can speed up the development of atherosclerosis (narrowing of the arteries) which can lead to stroke. If you have diabetes, your doctor can help you control your condition and reduce your risk of stroke.

For more information, see our website: [stroke.org.nz](http://stroke.org.nz)



REDUCE YOUR RISK OF  
**STROKE**

**STROKE**  
FOUNDATION • NZ

[stroke.org.nz](http://stroke.org.nz)

## WHAT IS A STROKE?

A stroke is a brain attack. Most strokes happen when a clot blocks the flow of blood to the brain.

A less common cause of stroke is when a blood vessel bursts and bleeds into the brain.

A stroke can be fatal or cause long-term disability. Depending on the part of the brain that is damaged, it can affect someone's ability to think, walk, talk, eat, see, read and do so many other things they were able to do before the stroke.

## REDUCE YOUR RISK OF STROKE

- Check your blood pressure regularly, and follow any treatment advised by your doctor
- Don't smoke
- Reduce your salt intake
- Eat healthy foods (limit fatty, sugary, salty foods)
- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Limit your alcohol intake
- Check your cholesterol level and follow any treatment advised by your doctor
- Get checked for atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat) and follow any treatment advised by your doctor
- If you have diabetes, manage your condition well.

These 10 points are explained in the next sections.

## CHECK YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE REGULARLY



High blood pressure is the number one modifiable risk factor for stroke. A person with high blood pressure is up to seven times more likely to have a stroke than someone with normal or low blood pressure.

Blood pressure is a measurement of the force of blood on the blood vessel walls as it travels through the body. High blood pressure puts additional stress on the blood vessels throughout your body, especially the ones in your brain. This can damage blood vessels which can lead to stroke.

Normal blood pressure is around 120/80 or lower. High blood pressure is when it is consistently over 140/90. The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to get it checked. If you do have high blood pressure, it is important to follow your doctor's advice.

A healthy diet, regular exercise, not smoking and keeping a healthy weight can help prevent high blood pressure.

## DON'T SMOKE

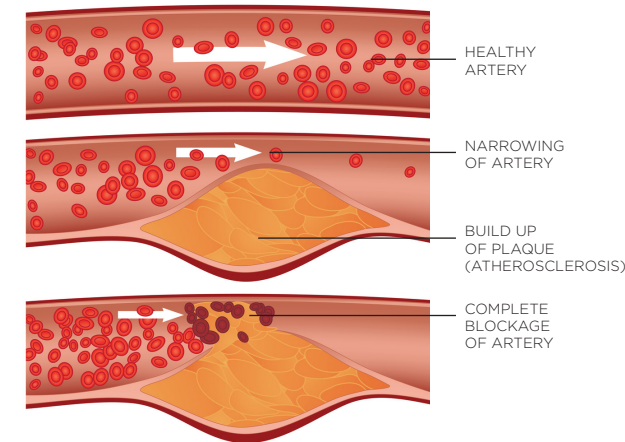
Tobacco smoking quadruples stroke risk!

This is because chemicals in cigarette smoke:

- speed up the formation of plaque (fat, cholesterol and other substances) on blood vessel walls resulting in atherosclerosis (narrowing of the arteries)
- thicken the blood, making it sticky and more likely to clot
- tighten the blood vessels which restricts blood flow and increases blood pressure.

However as soon as a person stops smoking, their stroke risk begins to drop and continues to improve each day. For support to quit smoking, talk with your GP or call the Quitline: **0800 778 778**.

### Smoking speeds up the process of atherosclerosis



## REDUCE YOUR SALT INTAKE

A diet high in salt (sodium) can increase blood pressure and the risk of stroke. The more sodium in your blood, the more your blood volume increases because sodium attracts and retains water. The heart has to work harder to move the increased volume of blood through the blood vessels. This creates increased strain on the arteries and high blood pressure.

It is recommended that adult New Zealanders have no more than one teaspoonful of salt (2,300mg sodium) a day from all food sources. Most of us eat far more salt than this each day – and about 75% of this salt comes from processed or takeaway foods.

## REDUCE YOUR RISK OF STROKE

You can reduce your salt intake by:

- choosing fresh rather than processed foods
- checking the label on packaged foods to help you choose lower-salt items. Lower-salt items contain less than 120mg of sodium per 100g of food
- cutting back on fast foods and takeaways
- using herbs, spices, ginger, lemon juice or other seasonings instead of salt in cooking and at the table.

For more information about salt, visit [stroke.org.nz/salt](https://stroke.org.nz/salt)