

Hispanics and Stroke



Stroke is the fourth leading cause of death for Hispanics living in the United States, and Hispanics have different risk factors for strokes. Compared to non-Hispanic whites, Hispanics have strokes at younger ages. The average age for a stroke among non-Hispanic whites is 80, but among Hispanics living in the United States, it's 67. Hispanics also have some of the highest rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity, which are leading risk factors for stroke.

These facts sound alarming, but there is good news: Up to 80% of strokes can be prevented. This means it is important to know your risk of having a stroke and take action to reduce that risk.

What Is a Stroke?

A stroke happens when blood flow to an area of the brain is cut off. When brain cells can't get oxygen, they die. Stroke is a medical emergency. It's important to get treatment as soon as possible. A delay in treatment increases the risk of permanent brain damage or death.

Why Are Hispanics at Higher Risk for Stroke?

- **High blood pressure** is one of the main conditions that can cause a stroke. About 3 out of 10 Hispanics have high blood pressure, and many do not know it.
- **Diabetes** is more common among people of Mexican, Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Central American ancestry. People with diabetes have a higher risk of stroke. An estimated 1 out of 6 Hispanics has diabetes—including many who don't know they have the disease.
- Being **overweight or obese** increases your risk of stroke. About three out of four Hispanics are overweight.
- **Smoking** doubles your risk of stroke. About 1 out of 5 Hispanic men and 1 out of 10 Hispanic women smoke.

Scientists don't know exactly why Hispanics have a higher risk for high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes, but they believe lifestyle and social factors may play a role.

If Stroke Happens, Act F.A.S.T.

Strokes come on suddenly and should be treated as medical emergencies. If you think you or someone else may be having a stroke, act F.A.S.T.:



F—Face:

Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?



A—Arms:

Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?



S—Speech:

Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is the speech slurred or strange?



T—Time:

If you see any of these signs, call 9-1-1 right away.

Calling an ambulance is critical because emergency medical technicians, or EMTs, can take you to a hospital that can treat stroke patients, and in some cases they can begin life-saving treatment on the way to the emergency room. Some treatments for stroke work only if given within the first 3 hours after symptoms start.



How Can I Prevent Stroke?

Most strokes can be prevented by keeping medical conditions under control and making lifestyle changes. A good place to start is to **ABCS of heart health**:

- A Aspirin:** Aspirin may help reduce your risk for stroke. But do not take aspirin if you think you're having a stroke. It can make some types of stroke worse. Before taking aspirin, talk with your doctor about whether aspirin is right for you.
- B Blood Pressure:** Control your blood pressure.
- C Cholesterol:** Manage your cholesterol.
- S Smoking:** Quit smoking or don't start.

Make lifestyle changes:

- **Eat healthy and stay active.** Choose healthy foods most of the time, including foods with less salt, or sodium, to lower your blood pressure and get regular physical activity. Being overweight raises your risk of stroke.
- **Go to the doctor.** It's important to find a doctor you feel comfortable with and can talk to about your health and risk factors for stroke, including your age and whether anyone in your family has had a stroke. Some Hispanics face barriers when it comes to accessing health care, including language barriers and lack of health insurance. [Community health workers](#), or *promotores de salud*, are available in many Spanish-speaking communities to help people overcome those barriers and get the help they need.
- **Get other health conditions under control,** such as diabetes.

What Is CDC Doing About Stroke?

CDC and its partners are leading national initiatives and programs to reduce the death and disability caused by stroke and to help Hispanics live longer, healthier lives.

- CDC's [Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention](#) (DHDSP) provides resources to all 50 states to address heart disease and stroke. DHDSP and its partners work together to support programs that reduce differences in health due to a person's ethnicity, income, or where they live.
- The [Paul Coverdell National Acute Stroke Program](#) funds states to measure, track, and improve the quality of care for all stroke patients. The program works to reduce death and disabilities from stroke.
- DHDSP supports the [WISEWOMAN](#) program that provides low-income, under-insured or uninsured women with screenings for chronic diseases, lifestyle programs, and referral services to help prevent heart disease and strokes.
- The [Million Hearts®](#) initiative, which is co-led by CDC and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, aims to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes by 2017.

Learn more by visiting www.cdc.gov/stroke