

# What Causes a Stroke? The Top 10 Reasons

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To understand what causes a stroke, we need to look at specific underlying medical conditions. While the immediate cause of a stroke is a clogged or burst artery in the brain, there are usually preexisting conditions that cause the biological event to happen in the first place. Here are the top 10 causes of stroke:

## Prior Stroke, TIA, or Heart Attack

If you've already had a stroke, TIA (transient ischemic attack, or 'mini stroke'), or heart attack, then your risk of stroke unfortunately increases dramatically. Taking preventative measures is absolutely critical the first month following a stroke or heart attack, so be sure to read up on what you can do to [reduce your risk of stroke](#).

## Age, Heredity, and Gender

Some of the other uncontrollable causes of stroke are your age, family history, and gender. Statistically speaking, your risk of stroke increases as you get older – although it's not uncommon for young individuals to have a stroke. Also, if anyone in your direct, immediate family has had a stroke then you're at a higher risk of stroke too. As far as gender goes, women have a higher risk of stroke than men due to pregnancy and oral contraceptives, among other girly things.

## Atrial Fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation is a heart rhythm disorder where your heart quivers instead of beating effectively. This quivering can potentially cause a clot to form, and if that clot travels to the brain and cuts off the blood supply, it can lead to a stroke.

*These are all the stroke risk factors that are out of your hands, meaning that you can't control them. So now let's get to the stroke risk factors that you can control.*

## High Blood Pressure

Hypertension (or high blood pressure) is the leading cause of stroke, so managing blood pressure is critical for reducing your risk of stroke.

### How to fix it:

Two ways to combat high blood pressure is stress management and reducing your [sodium intake](#). Perhaps some meditative yoga and clean cooking recipes are in your future. Now that doesn't sound too bad.

## Cigarette Smoking

Everyone knows that smoking is bad for you, but many don't know that it also increases clot formation (bad for your risk of stroke), thickens blood (also bad for your risk of stroke), and increases the amount of plaque buildup in the arteries (really bad for your risk of stroke).

### How to fix it:

Quitting smoking is hard, but it's necessary for good health. Try making verbal commitments to friends and family that you're going to quit. Accountability can really help you reach your goals.

## Atherosclerosis

[Atherosclerosis](#) occurs when your arteries become hardened by the buildup of plaque, increasing the likelihood that an artery will become clogged. The different types of atherosclerosis that are likely to cause a stroke are coronary heart disease (atherosclerosis of the heart), carotid artery disease (atherosclerosis of the neck – yikes!), and peripheral artery disease (atherosclerosis of the limbs).

### How to fix it:

Atherosclerosis can be treated with a 'heart-healthy lifestyle,' which includes [eating right](#), staying physically active, maintaining a healthy weight, quitting smoking, and managing chronic stress. It's a tall order, but your health is worth it.

As you can see, the top causes of stroke are directly tied to the condition of your arteries. So take care of your cardiovascular health and know your risks – it could save your life.