

# HEALTH & WELLNESS

## What is a silent stroke?

Silent stroke may not exhibit any symptoms, making it more difficult to detect.

The brain is a complex organ responsible for controlling many different bodily functions. When working at optimal capacity, the brain is a wonder to behold. When illness or trauma affects the brain, various parts of the body may not work as they should.

One of the more devastating things that can affect the brain is stroke. Stroke describes a sudden stoppage of blood from reaching the brain. Harvard Medical School states that if a large number of brain cells are starved of blood supply, they can die. With their demise, a person's memory and ability to speak and move can be compromised.

While many strokes come on suddenly, certain factors may indicate a person is at risk. Such factors may include prior heart attacks, genetics, high blood pressure, smoking, or a prior stroke. However, in a particular type of stroke - a "silent stroke" - symptoms are far more subtle and difficult to spot.

Silent cerebral infarction, often referred to as "SCI" or "silent stroke," is a brain injury likely caused by a blood clot interrupting blood flow to the brain, offers the American Stroke Association. Silent strokes increase risk for other



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strokes and can be a sign of progressive brain damage. A silent stroke is typically only noticed as a side component of an MRI of the brain. Many times patients do not recall having a stroke and never felt any symptoms. Silent strokes should not be mistaken for mini-strokes. Mini-stroke is a brief but discrete and memorable event, with symptoms

appearing for a few minutes or a few hours.

According to a study on silent stroke titled "Functional and Cognitive Consequences of Silent Stroke Discovered Using Brain Magnetic Resonance Imaging in an Elderly Population" and published in the Journal of American Geriatrics Society, silent strokes are quite

common and can have serious consequences. Researchers have found that silent stroke is associated with impairments in tests of cognitive function rather than movement-oriented performance tests like rising from a chair. Almost 50 percent of studied silent strokes affected frontal circuit components of the brain, such as the frontal cortex, basal

ganglia and thalamus. Lesions in these brain structures compromised executive functions and were related to vascular dementia. Another study showed associations between silent stroke and visual field deficits, weakness in walking on heels, history of memory loss, migraines, and lower scores in cognitive function tests.

The "silent" part of a silent stroke also refers to the areas of the brain that the stroke affects. Experts at Harvard Medical School explain that, during a silent stroke, an interruption in blood flow destroys areas of cells in a part of the brain that is "silent," meaning that it doesn't control any vital functions. Researchers say that, over time, the damage from silent strokes can accumulate, leading to more and more problems with memory. Collectively, silent strokes become silent no longer.

There are certain ways to reduce the risk of any type of stroke.

These include:

- managing high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels
- quitting smoking
- reducing the risk of diabetes and effectively treat the condition if it is present
- losing weight to prevent obesity
- exercising and avoid a sedentary lifestyle
- taking a low-dose aspirin or a drug that prevents blood clots.

Silent strokes largely go unrecognized but can lead to significant brain injury. Getting the facts can help men and women reduce their risk for silent stroke.

## 3 simple ways to a healthier heart

Heart disease is a formidable foe. According to the American Heart Association, heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, accounting for approximately 800,000 deaths every year. The Government of Canada notes that heart disease is the second leading cause of death in that country, annually accounting for tens of thousands of deaths. (Note: Canada's population is slightly more than one-tenth the population of the United States.)

While heart disease exacts a devastating toll on the United States and Canada, its reach extends far beyond North America, as the American College of Cardiology notes that cardiovascular disease accounts for 31 percent of all deaths across the globe.

In spite of the prevalence of heart disease, men and women are not helpless against it. In fact, there are many ways for

men and women to reduce their risk for heart disease.

### **MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT**

The American Heart Association reports that between 60 and 70 percent of Americans are overweight or obese. Carrying around extra weight takes a toll on the body, increasing a person's risk for heart disease and stroke. Overweight or obese men and women can work with their physicians to develop a plan for effective, long-term weight loss, a plan that will likely include a combination of diet and routine exercise.

### **UNDERSTAND AND MANAGE BLOOD PRESSURE**

The AHA notes that high blood pressure, a common condition affecting roughly one in three Americans, is often referred to as "the silent killer" because it does not necessarily produce symptoms. Blood pressure measures the force pushing outward on the walls

of blood vessels as they carry rich blood oxygen to the body's organs, and the force created as the heart rests between beats. Over time, the arterial walls of people with high blood pressure may become stressed and develop weak spots or scarring that makes them vulnerable to the buildup of plaque. Plaque buildup can increase the risk of blood clots and stroke. Blood pressure can rise as a person ages, so managing blood pressure involves routinely checking it and making certain changes, such as eating healthier foods and exercising more often, if it is high.

### **CONTROL CHOLESTEROL LEVELS**

High levels of low-density lipoprotein, often referred to as "bad" cholesterol, can increase a person's risk for heart disease. The AHA notes that excessive amounts of cholesterol can be deposited into the arteries as

plaque. When that happens, it leads to a condition known as atherosclerosis, or a narrowing of the inside of the artery walls. That narrowing leads to an increased risk for heart attack and stroke. Men and women should get their cholesterol lev-

els checked at least once every four to six years beginning at age 20. Men and women who have been diagnosed with high cholesterol should recognize that cholesterol is only found in animal products, so a diet that is rich in fruits, vegetables and

whole grains and low in animal products can provide a simple way for men and women to lower their cholesterol. A more thorough and detailed plan to lower cholesterol levels should be discussed with a physician.

## Flu-fighting tips to keep you and others healthy

Sniffles, sore throat, fever, and aches and pains may accompany a number of illnesses, but during the wintertime such symptoms are typically indicative of influenza.

Throughout much of North America, flu season peaks between December and February. But flu season can occur anywhere from October to March, advises the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The flu is contagious and can sideline people for extended periods of time. The CDC says that each year one in five Americans gets the flu.

Taking steps to fend off the flu can help men and women and the people they routinely come in contact with.

### **FOODS**

Food can be used to fend off the flu. Common foods that many people already have in their pantries can be powerful flu-fighters. Garlic, for example, contains compounds that have direct antiviral effects and may help destroy the flu before it affects the body. Raw garlic is best. In addition to garlic, citrus fruits, ginger, yogurt, and dark

leafy greens can boost immunity and fight the flu, according to Mother Nature's Network. The British Journal of Nutrition notes that dark chocolate supports T-helper cells, which increase the immune system's ability to defend against infection.

A study published in the American Journal of Therapeutics showed that carnosine, a compound found in chicken soup, can help strengthen the body's immune system and help fight off the flu in its early stages.

### **FLU SHOT AND MEDICATIONS**

Annual flu shots administered in advance of flu season can help protect people and their families from getting the flu. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration says that, in select situations, antiviral medications - which are usually prescribed to treat the flu and lessen symptoms - can reduce the chance of illness in people exposed to influenza.

Many over-the-counter medicines can alleviate symptoms of the flu, but cannot fend it off.

### **STOP GERM PROLIFERATION**

Germs can be spread easily between persons through direct contact and indirect contact with surfaces sick individuals have touched. Doctors recommend staying home for at least 24 hours after a flu-induced fever has dissipated. Well individuals should avoid contact with sick people.

Frequent hand-washing with soap and water can stop germs from spreading. When soap and water is not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers can help. People also should avoid touching their eyes, noses and mouths after being in public places or around someone who is ill.

### **REST AND RESTORE**

Those who feel symptoms coming on should begin drinking more liquids to keep the respiratory system hydrated and make mucus less viscous. Remember to get adequate sleep, as a tired body cannot effectively fight the flu virus.

People of all ages should take steps to protect themselves from the flu.



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