

# Article: Physical Health—cardiovascular

## *Content notes:*

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AUDIENCE	All ages looking to understand stroke risk factors and take preventative action through lifestyle changes.
COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES	White label content: Position stroke as largely preventable, empowering members to take control of modifiable risk factors like blood pressure, smoking and diet.
MESSAGE	Most strokes are preventable. Managing blood pressure, quitting smoking and making healthy lifestyle choices can significantly reduce your risk.
INSIGHTS	More than 45,000 Australians experience a stroke each year, yet over 80% of strokes can be prevented.
ASSOCIATED ASSET/S	Doctors on Demand Quit Smoking consultations, Stroke Foundation website, TAL Health Connector.
CTA	Get your blood pressure checked regularly and speak to your GP about your stroke risk factors.
REVIEW DATE	January 2026

## Reducing your risk of stroke

Stroke is the fourth leading cause of death in Australia and a leading cause of disability.<sup>1</sup> In 2023, more than 45,000 Australians experienced a stroke, that's one stroke every 11 minutes.<sup>2</sup> The good news is that more than 80% of strokes can be prevented<sup>3</sup>, so it's important to know what factors can help reduce your risk.

Dr Priya Chagan, General Manager Health Services at our insurance partner TAL, shares information on strokes and ways we can reduce our risk.

### What is a stroke?

A stroke is a medical condition that can affect anyone of any age. Most strokes happen in one of two ways:

1. When there is a blockage of an artery (a type of blood vessel) in your brain, which restricts blood flow to parts of the brain; or
2. When there is a rupture or break in the wall of a blood vessel in your brain, which causes bleeding in the brain.

### What factors can reduce your risk of a stroke?

There are many risk factors that can contribute to strokes, some which you cannot change, but many that you can. By making simple lifestyle changes, you can control some of your risk factors.

### How high blood pressure can increase your risk of having a stroke

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Causes of Death, Australia*. 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Stroke Foundation. *Economic Impact of Stroke Report*. 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Stroke Foundation. *Facts and Figures*. 2024.

Having persistently high blood pressure damages the blood vessel walls and can cause blood clots or plaques to break off artery walls and block the blood flow in an artery supplying the brain and other organs. Uncontrolled high blood pressure is often called "the silent killer" because it has no symptoms. That's why it's important to get your blood pressure checked regularly.

## How smoking can increase your risk of having a stroke

Both active smoking and being exposed to second-hand smoke increases your risk of having a stroke. It reduces the amount of oxygen in your blood and damages blood vessel walls which can increase the chance of clogging in the arteries of the brain and heart. Quitting smoking can be a challenge, but [Doctors on Demand](#) offer Medicare subsidised Quit Smoking consultations and resources to help.

## How being overweight can increase your risk of having a stroke

Carrying excess body weight can increase your risk of developing high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol. High cholesterol can contribute to the fatty deposits on the walls of an artery, which can restrict the blood flow to the brain, or dislodge and block an artery in the brain. Tackling weight loss can be difficult but you can take some [simple steps](#) to embrace a healthy and active lifestyle. How a poor diet can increase your risk of having a stroke

Having a diet that is consistently high in saturated or trans fats and high in sodium (salt) can increase your risk of a stroke. Drinking large amounts of alcohol can also increase your risk of stroke so it's important to limit your intake. Speak with your GP or a registered dietitian if you'd like more information.

## What are the signs of a stroke?

It is important to be familiar with the symptoms of a stroke and call an ambulance as soon as possible. Facial weakness, arm weakness with or without leg weakness, and difficulty with speech are the most common symptoms or signs of stroke, but other signs of stroke can be:

- Weakness, numbness or paralysis of the face, arm or leg on either or both sides of the body
- Difficulty speaking or understanding
- Dizziness, loss of balance or unexplained fall
- Loss of vision, sudden blurring or decreased vision in one or both eyes
- Headache, usually severe and abrupt in onset or unexplained change in the pattern of headaches
- Difficulty swallowing

## Watch for the signs

These signs can appear alone or in combination. When symptoms disappear within 24 hours, this may be a mini stroke or Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA).

If you are rushed to hospital with a suspected stroke, your health care team will perform tests to confirm the diagnosis and determine which treatment is best for you.

If you or someone around you experiences these symptoms, call triple zero (000) right away and ask for an ambulance. If you'd like to find out more about stroke, visit the Stroke Foundation website or speak with your GP.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, or unsure where to begin, speak to your GP or find support through the [TAL Health Connector](#).

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