



**American
Stroke
Association.**
A division of the
American Heart Association.

2021 Guideline for the Prevention of Stroke in Patients with Stroke and Transient Ischemic Attack

Top 10 Patient Messages

1. **Ischemic strokes, which make up 85% of strokes, are caused by a lack of blood flow or oxygen to the brain.** Ischemic stroke survivors are at risk for another stroke if the cause of the first stroke is not treated. The new guideline is important for ischemic stroke survivors and those who care for them because it includes the most recent findings from studies on preventing future ischemic strokes.

The recommendations give health care professionals more information on medical treatments for stroke survivors. They can also help stroke survivors understand the steps they can take to reduce the chances of another ischemic stroke.

2. **This guideline focuses on specific approaches to ischemic stroke prevention that best match the identified cause of the first stroke.** Causes of stroke include blockage of the small arteries in the brain, fatty deposit in the larger arteries leading to the brain and heart disease. It's important for your health care professional to identify the reason for the first stroke as quickly as possible to prevent future strokes.
3. **Our understanding of treatments to help prevent future strokes has greatly increased.** Taking into account the cause of the first stroke and the results of newer studies, health care professionals can offer treatment options that are tailored to individual patient situations. This includes patients with carotid artery disease, atrial fibrillation and other heart conditions.
4. **Controlling the risk factors for stroke is critical to preventing future strokes.** Achieving and maintaining healthy numbers for blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol (all risk factors for stroke) reduce the risk of a second stroke. Health care professionals should monitor these numbers and treat any problems. It's also important to manage and monitor your risk factors (e.g., by checking your blood pressure at home) and to understand how to take prescribed medications.

- 5. Lifestyle habits, including not smoking, limiting alcohol intake, eating a healthy diet, engaging in regular physical activity and avoiding prolonged periods of sitting or lying down are important to preventing a second stroke.** Low salt and/or Mediterranean diets are recommended for reducing the possibility of another stroke. Stroke survivors are encouraged to exercise or be active at least 10 minutes four times a week or have more vigorous activity at least 20 minutes twice a week. Stroke survivors who sit for long periods of time or who can't exercise by themselves are encouraged to find help exercising safely.

- 6. Changing your habits — for example by eating a healthier diet, doing more exercise and taking medications — requires more than just simple advice or a brochure.** Formal programs where physicians or other health care professionals help you change your routine and behavior can help stroke survivors make — and keep — needed changes.

Studies show that survivors who participate in cardiac rehabilitation programs that include an exercise program combined with education and counseling showed improvements in fitness, cholesterol levels and body weight, as well as decreases in future strokes.

- 7. Stroke survivors from historically under-resourced communities, including Black and Hispanic populations, may face social and economic difficulties, systemic racism and poor living conditions that contribute to ill health and make it difficult to make changes to prevent future strokes.** Health care professionals should evaluate these factors when managing stroke risk to address gaps in care. Further research is needed to determine the best methods for reducing care gaps after stroke for vulnerable populations.
- 8. Shared decision-making is a process where health care professionals describe treatment and prevention options, provide information on the risks and benefits of each option, and help patients choose the best treatment.** While the guideline provides important information for decision-making, it's important that stroke treatment and prevention planning address patients' wishes, goals, concerns and circumstances.
- 9. Irregular heartbeat problems like atrial fibrillation can put stroke survivors at high risk for a future stroke.** It may be important to look for these irregular heartbeats with monitoring by a health care professional, especially in older patients, because AFib can often be treated with medications such as blood thinners.
- 10. Most patients with an ischemic stroke (from a blood clot or other blockages in blood vessels in the brain) or a TIA (transient ischemic attack) need medication that reduces the risk of another stroke or TIA.** The medication prevents blood clots or prevents blockages in the blood vessels supplying blood flow to the brain. It's important to take these medications according to your health care professional's instructions.