

LGBTQ+ People:

Are You at Risk for Stroke?

American Stroke Association

Objectives

This presentation will explore the connection between LGBTQ+ identity and stroke risk. Specifically, we will:

1. Learn what a stroke is and how to recognize warning signs.
2. Understand common stroke risk factors for LGBTQ+ people.
3. Discuss how to protect brain health.





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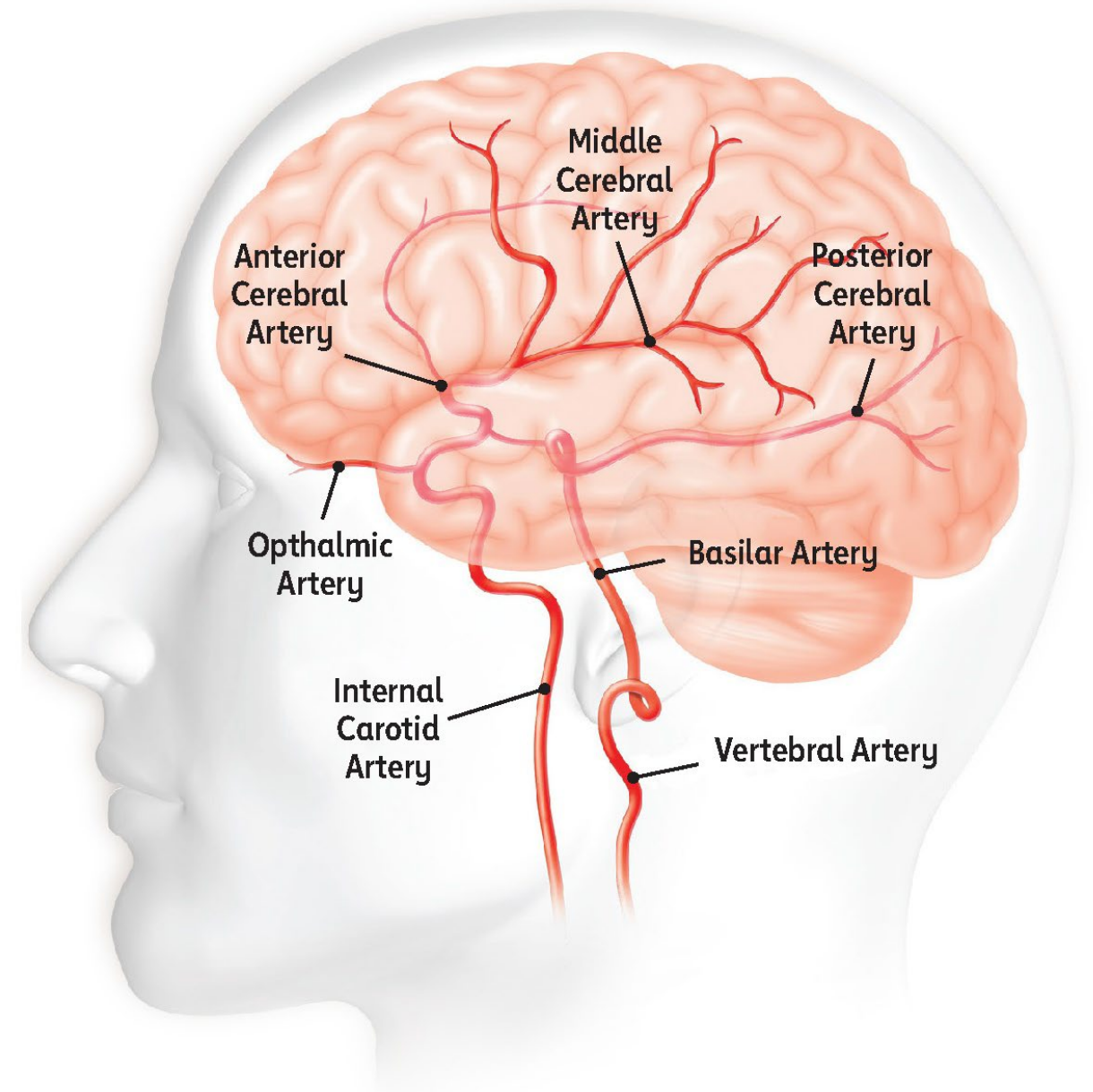
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What Is a Stroke?

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What Is a Stroke?

- A stroke is a serious medical condition that most often occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is cut off.
- Stroke is a “brain attack.”
- Although stroke is more common after age 55, it can happen at any age and any time.
- Stroke is the No. 5 cause of death and a leading cause of disability in the United States.



Types of Stroke

ISCHEMIC STROKE

This occurs when a clot blocks a vessel and stops blood from reaching the brain.

It is the most common type of stroke, accounting for about 87% of strokes.

HEMORRHAGIC STROKE

This occurs when a blood vessel in the brain bursts and leads to bleeding inside the brain.

Hemorrhagic strokes account for about 13% of strokes. But they are linked to a higher risk of death.

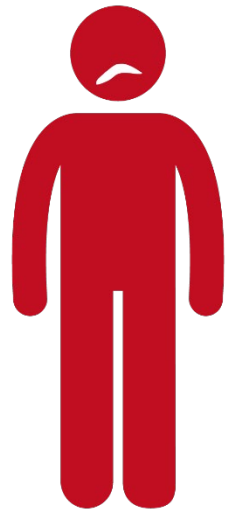
TRANSIENT ISCHEMIC ATTACK

Also known as TIA, this is a temporary blockage of blood flow to the brain. The clot usually dissolves on its own or gets dislodged.

TIAs produce symptoms just like a stroke, but typically last a shorter amount of time. A TIA is a “warning stroke” signaling a possible full-blown stroke ahead.

How to Recognize a Stroke

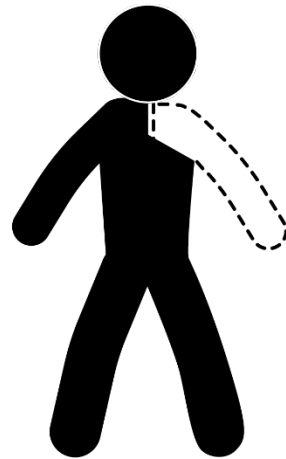
Use the letters “F.A.S.T.” to help spot a stroke:



F

Face drooping

Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop, or is it numb?



A

Arm weakness

Ask the person to raise both arms. Is one arm weak or numb, or does one arm drift downward?



S

Speech difficulty

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



T

Time to call 911

If you observe any of these signs, call 911 immediately!

Other Stroke Symptoms

Watch for sudden onset of:



Numbness

or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body



Confusion,

trouble speaking or understanding speech



Vision Problems

in one or both eyes



Difficulty Walking,

dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination



Severe Headache

with no known cause



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LGBTQ+ and Risk Factors

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In the U.S., about 4.5% of adults identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

LGBTQ+ adults may delay health care due to fear of discrimination, leading to undiagnosed or unmanaged conditions and increased stroke risk.

Stroke Risk Factors



**High
Blood
Pressure**



**Tobacco
Use**



Obesity



**Lack of
Physical
Activity**



Stress

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure damages arteries over time. Damaged arteries can clog more easily, and the constant strain of high blood pressure can weaken them. Both of these factors can increase stroke risk.

- Studies have shown that LGBTQ+ people have higher rates of high blood pressure, compared with non-LGBTQ+ people.
- Gay and bisexual adults may be less likely to take prescribed high blood pressure medication, which is crucial for stroke prevention.
- Bisexual men have twice the odds of having high blood pressure, compared with heterosexual men.
- Testosterone therapy increases systolic blood pressure and may increase diastolic blood pressure.



Tobacco Use

Tobacco smoke contains thousands of harmful chemicals that enter the bloodstream and can damage blood vessels, leading to stroke.

- LGBTQ+ adults, particularly women, are more likely to use tobacco than other adults.
- About 25% of lesbian, gay or bisexual adults use any commercial tobacco product, compared with 18.8% of heterosexual adults.
- Transgender adults are 31.3% more likely to use e-cigarettes than cisgender adults.



By addressing obesity through lifestyle changes such as diet and exercise, individuals can significantly reduce their risk for stroke.

- Many LGBTQ+ people express fear of exercising in public spaces due to discrimination, contributing to obesity rates.
- Lesbian women are almost 50% more likely to be obese, compared with heterosexual women.
- Bisexual women are 43% more likely to be obese, compared with heterosexual women.



Regular physical activity can lower high blood pressure. And exercise enhances blood flow and oxygen to the brain, which may help prevent the types of blockages that can cause strokes. Other benefits include:

- **It's like a workout for your brain.** Getting active, even just going for a walk, can help your brain work better, especially for remembering things and planning ahead.
- **It helps you stay sharp.** Studies show that people who exercise regularly are less likely to have problems with thinking and memory as they age.
- **It can even make your brain stronger.** Just like muscles, your brain gets stronger when you use it. Regular physical activity can help build up parts of your brain that are important for learning and remembering.

Physical Activity



Stress and Mental Health

Let's discuss the impact of discrimination, stigma and stress on mental health and the connection to stroke risk.

- LGBTQ+ people are at particular risk for experiencing shame, fear, discrimination, and adverse and traumatic events.
- Research has suggested that LGBTQ+ people use mental health services at substantially higher rates than their heterosexual counterparts.
- Mental health conditions such as depression have also been associated with an increased risk of stroke.
- Factors such as depression and perceived stress have been found to be strongly connected to the severity of stroke.

It's important to manage stress effectively and seek help for mental health issues to reduce stroke risk and improve overall health.



Cardiovascular Health in Transgender People

Transgender people have a 40% higher risk of cardiovascular disease, compared with cisgender people.

- Risk of heart attack and death from cardiovascular disease is higher in transgender people.
- The use of hormone therapy such as estrogen or testosterone therapy may increase cardiovascular disease risk and fuel risk factors. Evidence suggests that estrogen therapy for transgender women increases risk for stroke caused by a blood vessel blockage or blood clots in the veins (known as venous thromboembolism).
- Hormone therapy may increase triglycerides in transgender women and men.
- Testosterone therapy may increase LDL (bad) cholesterol and decrease HDL (good) cholesterol, both of which can increase risk for stroke.



Barriers to Health Care for LGBTQ+ Individuals

IMPLICIT BIAS

LGBTQ+ individuals often report stereotyping, power imbalances and health care that is “transactional” instead of relationship-building, leading to lower-quality care or reduced access to care.

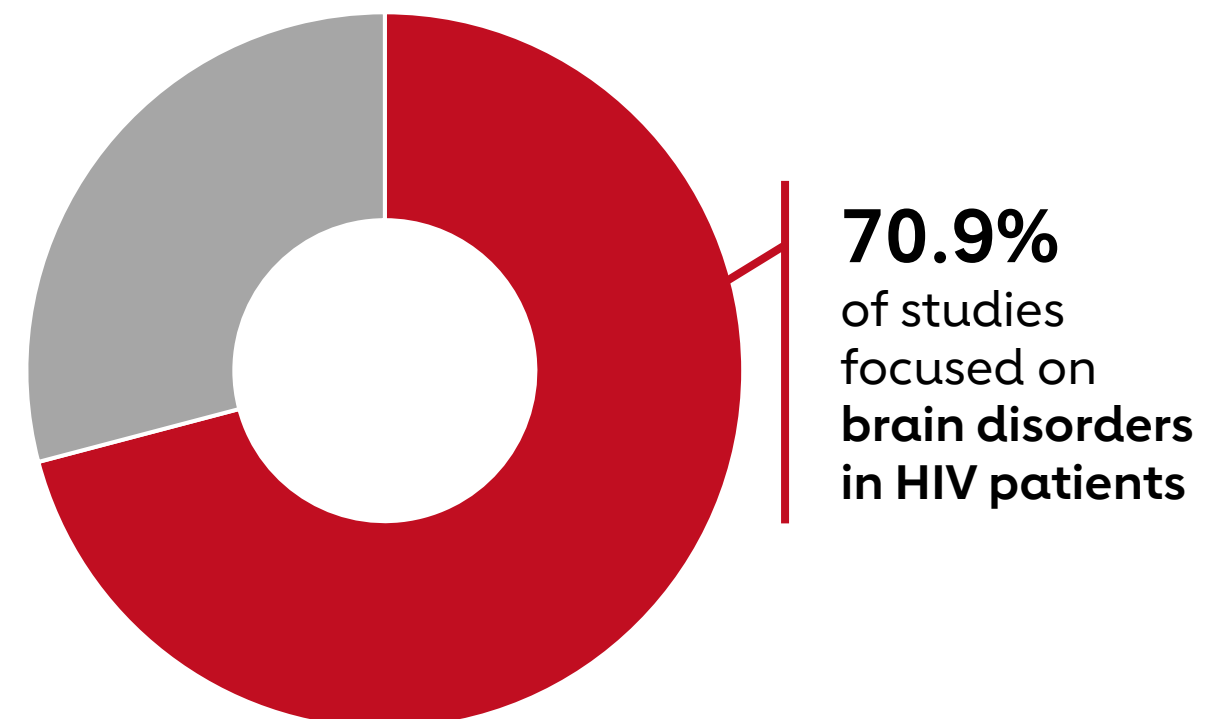
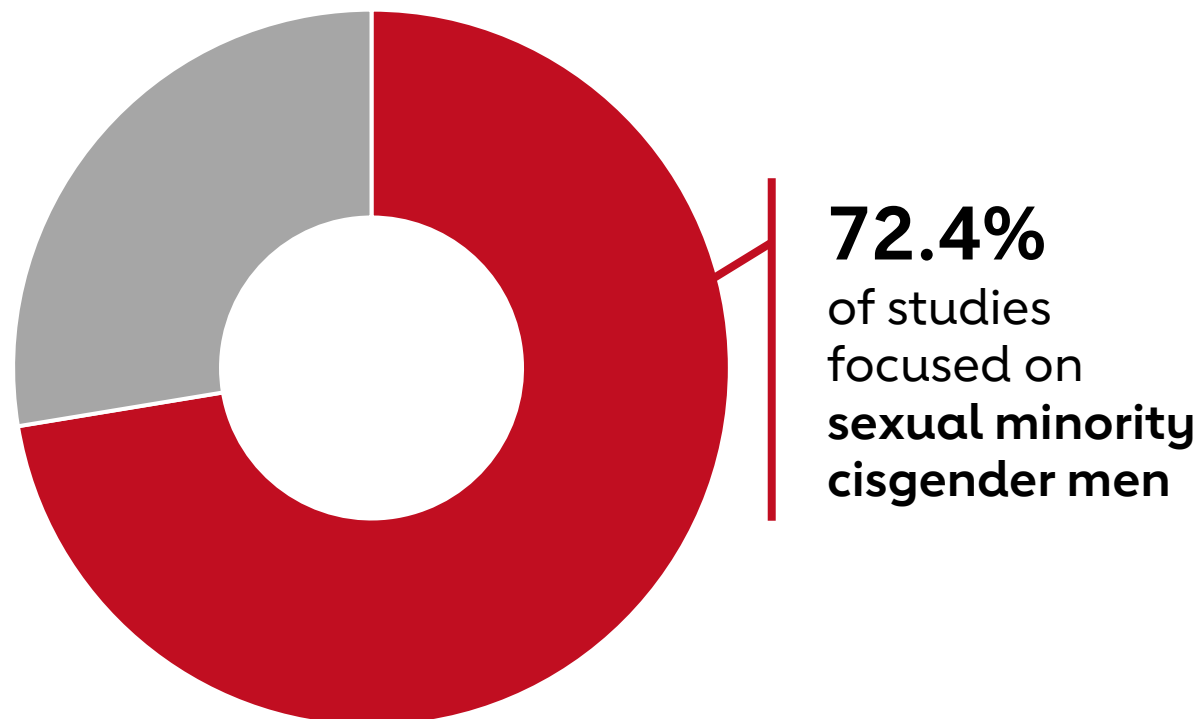
CULTURAL COMPETENCY

LGBTQ+ individuals also report inadequate cultural competency among health care professionals as a major barrier to health care. A lack of providers who are knowledgeable about LGBTQ+ health issues and risk factors reduces access to care.

LGBTQ+ Disparities in Neurological Research

Little research has focused on the brain health of LGBTQ+ individuals, though existing research indicates health disparities for this group.

One survey of neurological research in the sexual and gender minority community found that:





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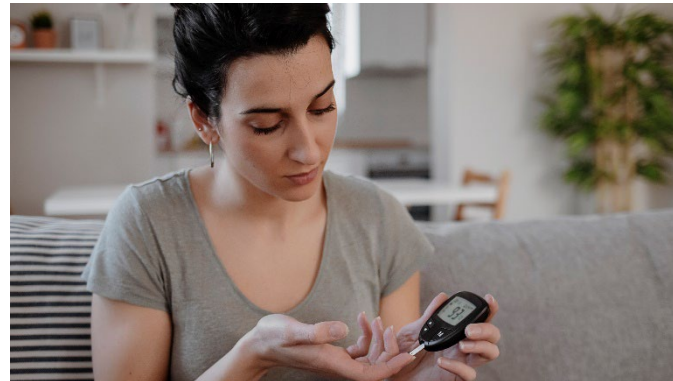
Taking Control of Your Brain Health

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GET REGULAR CHECKUPS

Keep up with routine medical exams and screenings.



KNOW YOUR RISK FACTORS

- High blood pressure
- Tobacco use
- Diabetes
- Physical inactivity
- Obesity
- Hormone therapy
- Stress



MAKE HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHOICES

- Opt for healthy eating pattern that includes fruit, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein.
- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity weekly.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.
- Quit tobacco.
- Practice stress-reduction techniques.
- Take prescribed medications as directed.
- Build your support network.

The Importance of Social Support



**Enhanced
Well-being**



**Reduced
Stress**



**Improved
Mental Health**



**Encouragement
of Healthier
Behaviors**



**Professional
Guidance**

You can advocate for LGBTQ+ health and brain health. Here's how:

FIND YOUR REPRESENTATIVE

Use the Find Your Representative service on the [House.gov](https://www.house.gov) website by entering your ZIP code and address to match it to your congressional district. This will provide links to your member's website and contact page.

CONTACT METHODS

- Email
- Phone
- Mail
- Social media

BE PREPARED

- Clearly state the issue you are contacting them about.
- Be concise and respectful in your communication.
- Provide your contact information for a response.

Stroke disproportionately affects LGBTQ+ people due to higher rates of risk factors and gaps in care.

Creating inclusive health care environments and promoting more research are crucial steps to address these inequalities.

Being proactive — taking charge of your health — can help reduce your risk.

Let's work together to improve stroke outcomes for everyone.

Conclusions





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Group Discussion

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**Share an experience or insight on how
mental health and access to health care
have affected your physical well-being.**





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**Do you know someone
who has survived a stroke?**





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How do you recognize stroke when it happens?





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**What types of small changes
can you implement to reduce
your risk for stroke?**





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Any tips on how you have been able to find culturally competent care where you have felt heard and understood?



Learn more about risk factors
and stroke prevention at
www.stroke.org