# Care Gram
# Stroke

**What Is a Stroke?**
A stroke (a brain attack) is a sudden loss of brain function. This occurs when blood flow leading to the brain is disrupted and prevents oxygen from reaching a part of the brain tissue. Without oxygen, the brain cells begin to die.

You have been diagnosed with a stroke or stroke-like symptoms during your hospital stay. Review the following to reduce your risk of a future stroke.

**Types of Strokes**
- Hemorrhagic stroke – occurs when a weak blood vessel in the brain bursts and causes bleeding.
- Ischemic stroke – occurs when a blood vessel in the brain develops a clot that cuts off blood supply.
- Transient ischemic attack (TIA) or mini-stroke – occurs when blood flow to a certain part of the brain is cut off for a short period of time.

**Risk Factors Under Your Control**

<u>High Blood Pressure</u>
High blood pressure is a leading risk factor for stroke. High blood pressure occurs when the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your vessels is too high. Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80 mm Hg.

<u>Tobacco Use</u>
The nicotine and carbon monoxide in cigarettes damages your heart and blood vessels. Tobacco use doubles the risk of another stroke. Quitting smoking can reduce the risk of stroke.

<u>High Cholesterol</u>
Cholesterol or plaque build-up in the arteries can block normal blood flow to the brain and cause a stroke and increase the risk of heart disease. Maintain healthy cholesterol levels.

<u>Diabetes</u>
People with poorly controlled blood sugar are at twice as likely to have a stroke as someone who does not have diabetes. If you are a diabetic, continue healthy eating habits and take medications as prescribed by your provider. A1C test shows your average blood glucose levels for the past 3 months. The goal is to keep A1C less than 7 percent.

<u>Atrial fibrillation (irregular heartbeat)</u>
Atrial fibrillation is a heart rhythm disorder that can result in a blood clot traveling to the brain causing a stroke.

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TIA (mini strokes)
Nearly 1 in 5 people who have a suspected TIA will have a stroke within 90 days. When given the appropriate scan, 2 in 5 will learn that they actually had a stroke instead of a TIA.

Physical Inactivity
Physical inactivity can increase the risk of stroke. Exercises, such as brisk walking, water aerobics, tennis, and biking for 30 minutes, 5 times a week, can help reduce the risk of stroke. A recent study showed that people who exercise 5 or more times per week are less likely to have another stroke. Increase your physical activity.

Alcohol Use
Some studies say that drinking more than 2 drinks per day may increase stroke risk by 50 percent. Other studies have indicated that one alcoholic beverage a day may lower a person's risk for stroke, provided that there is no other medical reason for avoiding alcohol. Talk with a doctor about alcohol use and how it can best be controlled to prevent another stroke.

History of a Previous Stroke
People who have already had a stroke are up to 4 times more likely to have another stroke than those who have never had one. Identifying and reducing your risk factors significantly lowers your risk.

Carotid Artery Disease
Stoke occurs when plaque buildup (atherosclerosis) narrows the artery and breaks off to form clots in the brain. It is important to follow all medical management or surgical recommendations to treat blockages.

**Warning Signs of Stroke**
Use B.E.F.A.S.T. to remember the warning signs of a stroke:

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| **B**alance loss: | Is the person having trouble walking or experiencing dizziness? |
| **E**ye (vision changes): | Ask the person if they are experiencing blurred vision, double vision, or loss of sight in one or both eyes. |
| **F**ace drooping: | Ask the person to smile. Is the person's smile uneven? |
| **A**rm weakness: | Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward? |
| **S**peech difficulty: | Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Is their speech slurred or difficult to understand? |
| **T**ime to call 911: | If you observe any of these signs, call 911 immediately. |

**Other Signs and Symptoms**
- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg (usually on one side of the body)
- Sudden nausea, fever, or vomiting
- Struggle to speak and understand words or simple sentences
- Sudden blurred vision or decreased vision in one or both eyes
- Problems swallowing
- Dizziness, loss of balance, or loss of coordination
- Brief loss of consciousness
- Unable to move part of the body (paralysis)
- Sudden headache that is intense and not related to something else

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**Treatments**
Tests may be done to show the type of stroke and the area of the brain that is involved in the stroke. These may include:
- A CAT scan (CT) of your head
- An MRI (which uses magnetic waves to create a clear picture of the brain)
- An echocardiogram of your heart and a carotid Doppler study – these tests scan for the embolic (clot-forming) source that may have caused a clot to form

Medications dissolve blood clots or prevent new ones. Some of these are:
- Heparin
- Aspirin
- Plavix
- Thrombolytics (clot-busters) (TPA)

Other treatments that you may need include:
- Surgery to remove blood clots or control bleeding
- Help getting up and moving around
- Help with eating, especially if you are unable to swallow
- A rehabilitation program may be recommended to help you recover

**Prevention**
Good health habits can help prevent future strokes. Your doctor may suggest:
- A low-fat, low-salt diet
- Exercising in moderation
- Quitting smoking
- Maintaining a normal weight
- Getting regular check-ups
- Recognize your risk factors that are under your control
- Follow all instructions for medications and tests ordered by your healthcare provider

**Call 911 right away if you have a:**
- Sudden onset of weakness and/or numbness
- Change in vision
- Change in balance
- Difficulty speaking or swallowing

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