

## Stroke Awareness for All Ages

### May is American Stroke Month



**S**troke is the third-leading cause of death in the United States after heart disease and cancer. Stroke is also a leading cause of acquired adult disability since there are 7 to 8 times more stroke survivors than deaths. Although more strokes occur in the elderly, stroke is also a major cause of morbidity and death among middle aged people, according to the American Stroke Association.

#### What causes stroke?

Strokes occur when something interferes with the normal flow of blood to the central nervous system.

- Ischemic strokes are caused by clots that block the flow of blood through arteries.
- Hemorrhages occur when arteries burst inside or on the brain surface.

When blood flow is interrupted, the brain doesn't get the oxygen and nutrients it needs and cells begin to die. Relatively few brain cells will be affected if the interruption is brief, and the person may recover fully. Otherwise, the ASA says, the damage may be severe and permanent. One-third of stroke survivors need help caring for themselves.

The part of the brain that's damaged depends on the location of the stroke. Areas commonly affected include those that involve sensory perceptions, movement, memory, thought patterns, behavior, and the ability to talk or understand speech.

Treatment for stroke victims includes medication, surgery, hospital care, and rehabilitation. If someone with a stroke goes to the hospital early enough, clot dissolving medication - called a thrombolytic or tPA - can be given.

#### Warning Signs

Anyone having a stroke should seek medical attention immediately. Warning signs include:

- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm, or leg on one side of the body.
- Sudden dimness or loss of vision, particularly in only one eye.
- Loss of speech or trouble talking or understanding speech.
- Sudden, severe headaches with no known cause.
- Unexplained dizziness, unsteadiness, or sudden falls, especially combined with any other symptom.

#### Reducing Your Risk

Strokes can happen to anyone. You may prevent a stroke by taking the following actions:

- Control your blood pressure. High blood pressure (over 140/90) is the biggest risk factor for stroke.
- Don't smoke. Chemicals in tobacco raise your blood pressure, reduce the amount of oxygen your blood carries to your brain, make blood thicker and stickier, and promote clotting.
- Control your cholesterol. High LDL ("bad")

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- cholesterol levels damage your arteries and promote plaque formation.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight increases your risk of high blood pressure.
- Be physically active. Getting regular aerobic exercise promotes overall cardiovascular health.
- Eat a balanced diet, including a full complement of fruits and vegetables. Some fad diets may be unhealthy if they promote too much fat or salt.
- Control diabetes. People with the disease are more likely to have strokes.
- Take little strokes seriously. A small clot will sometimes clog an artery briefly, causing temporary weakness, dizziness, or other symptoms. These transient ischemic attacks often precede a major stroke.
- Follow your healthcare provider's advice for treatment of heart disease, including coronary artery blockage, heart wall movement abnormalities, and abnormal rhythms like atrial fibrillation.
- Find out if you need to have your carotid arteries (arteries in the neck that supply blood to the brain) checked for narrowing.

**For more information:**

[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

<http://cascade.personaladvantage.com/logon?target=content&sub=10000216>



## 20 Proven Stress Busters May is Mental Health Month

Have office tensions got you on the verge of exploding? Do you feel like biting your computer, or maybe your boss? Help is on the way. The following relaxation techniques can help relieve both the physical and mental tensions that come with your exciting and stressful career.

- **Breathe deeply.** Close your eyes and breathe in slowly. Let the breath out for a count of five. Do this 10 times. Feel your body expand and contract with each breath.
- **Stretch.** Raise your arms above your head. Stretch left and hold for four counts. Stretch right and hold for four counts. Reach straight up and stretch your back and shoulder muscles. Gently stretch your right ear toward your right shoulder. Repeat on the other side. Open your mouth as wide as you can and yawn.
- **Exercise.** Take a brisk walk at lunch or during a break. Climb the stairs.
- **Eat well.** Snack on fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain foods. They have lots of stress-busting B and C vitamins.
- **Put a flower on your desk and spend a moment every hour contemplating it.** Imagine you're an ant walking among the petals and taking in the colors and fragrance of the flower close up.
- **Skip your next cup of coffee.** Try a new fruit juice instead.

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- **Eat a tangerine.** Peel it slowly, noticing the mist and the fragrance. Observe the structure of each section and eat it as slowly as you can, savoring each bite. As you eat, imagine the sunny grove where the tangerine grew.
- **Laugh.** Keep a good joke book handy, take a few moments to jot down the funny aspects of your present situation, or think of a favorite scene from a funny movie.
- **Talk.** Chat with coworkers about hobbies and activities outside of work.
- **Close your eyes and picture a peaceful place:** a meadow, an ocean scene, or a favorite room in your house. Visualize the scene in detail, with all the sights, sounds, and smells.
- **Look out the window.** Let your thoughts drift as you look.
- **Take a mental break.** Put your job aside for five minutes and concentrate on your life away from work. Make plans to do something pleasant for yourself or someone else when you get home.
- **Visit a tree during your lunch break.** Enjoy the texture of the bark and the pattern of its leaves against the sky.
- **Meditate.** Close your eyes, breathe slowly and deeply, and repeat a soothing word with each breath. Do this for five or 10 minutes.
- **Savor a cup of hot herbal tea or broth.** Close your eyes and inhale the steam.
- **Finish an easy task,** something you've been putting off because it's "not important."
- **Play.** Work a crossword or other puzzle during a break.
- **Give yourself a massage.** Rub your left shoulder, neck, and scalp with your right hand, and repeat on the right side with your left hand.
- **Sit up straight in your chair,** then drop your upper torso, arms and head between your knees. Exhale and then take a deep breath as you slowly roll up, beginning at the base of your spine.
- **Explore as many variations of your sitting position as you can while maintaining good basic posture:** feet flat on the floor in front of you, lower back supported against your chair, and keeping an imaginary straight line from your ears, through your shoulders, to your hips.

For more information:

<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/may>

<http://cascade.personaladvantage.com/logon?target=mental>



## Buying Your Family's Health Care Coverage? Begin with Some Smart Steps

These days, it really doesn't matter whether you're buying health care coverage through an employer or independently. In the world of health insurance, everyone is going to have to start acting like a cost-cutting entrepreneur. If you've ever heard of "catastrophic" healthcare policies with deductibles in the thousands of dollars, you're looking at the future model of everyone's health care coverage. As health care costs increase, employers have to find ways to limit their exposure to rising costs, so individuals will be carrying more of the burden.

According to a March report by benefits consultant Watson Wyatt, nearly half (47 percent) of the 453 large U.S. employers currently offer a consumer-directed health plan (CDHP), a high-deductible plan offered with a personal account that can be used to pay a portion of medical expenses not covered under the plan. In the world of independently purchased health insurance by businesspeople, it's the same concept as the pairing of a high deductible health plan (HDHP) with a health savings account (HSA).

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Also, don't be surprised if your employer is going to get tougher about you losing weight, quitting smoking, or taking part in a monitored exercise plan.

How do you get ready for this brave new world? Here are some ideas:

**Take the initiative on changing your health care behavior:** Lowering the number on your bathroom scale will have immediate health benefits; it will also make your health insurance options and potential out-of-pocket costs more affordable over time. A Stanford University and Rand Corporation study reported that lifetime medical costs related to diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol, hypertension, and stroke among the obese are \$10,000 higher than among the non-obese. It added that lifetime medical costs could be reduced by \$2,200 to \$5,300 following a 10 percent reduction in body weight.

**Know what you're buying:** Whether you buy health insurance through an agent or your employer, insist that they explain exactly what you're getting for your premium, and where deductibles do and don't apply. That way, you'll have a baseline when you buy your own coverage. If you're purchasing your own insurance policy, compare the premium savings from a higher deductible plan with your usage pattern of health services. What you save can often cover your high deductible.

**Always discuss the potential cost of a diagnosis:** If your physician diagnoses a condition that requires tests, prescription drugs, a hospital stay, or ongoing therapy, ask polite but detailed questions about what you'll be charged, from the doctor's bills to ongoing ancillary costs associated with treatment. Ask the doctor or his office manager to possibly negotiate a discounted fee for service. It's possible to get discounts through cash payments as well. Also consider asking for generic options and samples of prescription drugs to extend your savings.

**Check local pricing resources:** In non-emergency situations, you should always compare prices on treatments. Check with local medical boards and state health officials to see if they have online databases on costs for various medical procedures. Also, if there is a support group for your condition, talk to members about what they paid locally for care.

**Talk to a financial adviser about planning for long-term care:** If you or a loved one are diagnosed with a chronic illness, that's a financial issue that requires a plan. As tough as it may be to focus on money issues at a stressful time, make an appointment with a tax professional or a financial planner to discuss affordability options that will safeguard your assets, including Medical Spending Accounts that can backstop out-of-pocket costs on high-deductible policies.

**Take advantage of your company's flexible spending account:** A flexible spending account (FSA) is a separate, tax-advantaged account where you deposit funds to pay for medical expenses not paid by your insurance. You need to check what your particular company's FSA allows you to stockpile funds for, and you will need to estimate carefully because you'll have to spend out these funds by a particular annual date or lose the remainder. It's also good to discuss how you're allocating those expenses with a financial planner.

*Courtesy of the Financial Planning Association® (FPA®)*

**For more information:**

<http://cascade.personaladvantage.com/logog?target=content&sub=10000094>