

# Stroke threat to African Americans

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More than half of U.S. adults are overweight and more than 30 percent are obese. For blacks, the numbers are even higher. Regular physical activity and proper diet can help decrease the obesity. High cholesterol. High blood levels of cholesterol can increase the risk of atherosclerosis, which leads to blockage of blood vessels and contributes to stroke risk. It is important to have your cholesterol levels measured by a physician. If your levels are high, diet and/or medication can be given to control blood cholesterol.

Smoking - Cigarette smoking doubles the risk of stroke. Among other things, smoking damages the blood vessel walls (speeding up the process of atherosclerosis), raises blood pressure, and makes the heart work harder. Women who smoke have special concerns. If a woman smokes, takes oral contraceptives, and has a history of migraines, her risk of stroke is increased dramatically! Within 5-15 years of quitting smoking, the risk of stroke decreases to that of someone who has never smoked. So, it's worth it to get help to quit now.

Heart disease - African-Americans have a higher incidence of heart disease than whites. People with heart disease are at greater risk of stroke than those whose hearts work normally. You can reduce your risk for heart disease by adopting healthy lifestyle changes, such as quitting smoking, eating healthy, exercising, and decreasing stress.

Early signs of stroke  
Approximately half of stroke deaths occur before the person reaches the hospital. In order to take action promptly, you must be aware of the early signs of stroke:

- Sudden numbness or

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

- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

If you or a loved one experiences any of these symptoms, call 911 or get to the hospital immediately.

You can successfully reduce your risk for stroke. Make sure to discuss your risks and prevention strategies like we just discussed with your physician.

Contribution by Aisha Bobcombe, BA

For more information about the Maya Angelou Research Center on Minority Health, visit [www.wfubmc.edu/minority-health](http://www.wfubmc.edu/minority-health). Or, for health information call (336) 713.7578.

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*"For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thy wounds, saith the Lord." - Jeremiah 30: 17*



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There are those times when we set out on the road to success that we may look at our lives and feel that our best days are behind us. We may feel that we have waited too long to pursue what we really want out of life. We may think that the present circumstances of career or family are barriers to the kind of life we have dreamed of having.

As we take inventory of our lives, it may seem to us that we should just settle for what good we have managed to find so far and not complain. We may even say that there are other people who are worse off than we are and we should just be grateful for the good we have and let that be enough for us.

On the other hand, we may be prone to projecting everything into the future. We may tell ourselves that tomorrow will be a better day. We say that we will start tomorrow, next week, next month, or in the New Year to change our lives. However, we end up putting things off until the next day or we push them back until two weeks from now. The next month becomes three months, six months turn into next year and we still have not taken any steps to create the changes we want in our lives.

The future we are all waiting for cannot become a reality if we never take the steps to make it happen. Consequently, we find ourselves in the very same spot that we were in already.

One of the keys to success is learning to move beyond the past, whether our past is our successes or failures. We cannot change the past and the future is not yet.

Always remember that the best days are not behind you. If you want to be truly successful, realize that the most important days are not the past or the future. The day to make your dreams come true is the present. Today is the day to make a difference in your life. Today is the day to take the first step to create the kind of life you have always wanted. Will you decide today to make your dreams come true?

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