



STRIKE THE RIGHT BALANCE

Stroke prevention involves minimising risk factors, such as controlling high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol and tobacco abuse. Kohila Govindaraju, a nutritionist in private practice, shows you how to keep stroke at bay with a balanced diet.

The brain needs oxygen and nutrients, the life sustaining products delivered via blood, in order to function properly. A stroke occurs when there is a lack of blood proportionate to the brain that results in loss of brain function. The stroke can be caused by a ruptured blood vessel (aneurysms) or by a floating clot that interrupts or blocks the blood flow to the brain. Depending on which area the brain is affected, the stroke can cause speech impairment, paralysis, unconsciousness or even death.

Narrowing, furring, hardening or weakening of blood vessels or thickening of the blood flow will end up in stroke. Haemorrhagic strokes occur when a blood vessel in the brain breaks or ruptures. Ischaemic stroke can occur when too much plaque (fatty deposits and cholesterol) clogs the brain's blood vessels.

The most common causes of haemorrhagic stroke are high blood pressure and brain aneurysms. Older people and those with strong family histories of hypertension, heart disease, and strokes have a higher risk of stroke than people without these histories. These risk factors, however, can be controlled.

Risk factors to watch for and control:

- High blood pressure: If there is a high blood pressure, we need to keep it under control. High blood pressure increases the risk of a haemorrhagic stroke.
- Heart disease: The causes of heart attacks are the causes for strokes too. Strokes are called brain attacks.
- Smoking: Smoking doubles the risk of having a stroke because it causes the arteries

to fur up and makes the blood more likely to clot that increases the risk of stroke.

- Diabetes: Diabetes has an adverse affect on our arteries that reduces or blocks blood flow to the brain.
- Alcohol: Drinking too much alcohol can raise blood pressure and lead to heart failure or stroke [American Heart Association].

It is wise to institute good, healthier practices early in life. Eating and exercise habits need to be improved at younger age. Sitting for hours before the television and chowing down fat-foods like hamburgers, fries, and sugary soft drinks will increase the likelihood of premature heart attack or stroke.

Healthy tips to stay stroke-free

The food we eat influences our risk of having a stroke. Consuming different food groups, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains cereals, protects us against stroke. High cholesterol and too much of salt in the diet will increase our risk of getting stroke early in life.

“PREVENTING LITTLE THINGS FROM BECOMING BIG THINGS, KEEPS US ENJOYING LIFE AND STAYING HEALTHY.”

Make healthier choices:

- Two servings each of fruits and vegetables daily will provide sufficient potassium, folate, and antioxidants that protect against stroke. One serving is equivalent to:
 1 small apple, orange, pear or mango (130g)
 1 wedge papaya, pineapple or watermelon (130g)
 10 grapes or longans(50g)
 Raw leafy vegetables (150g)
 ¾ mug cooked vegetables (100g)
 [ABCs of Healthy Eating, HPB]
- Reduce salt intake: Avoid processed foods as they can be high in salt. Excess salt raises the blood pressure. Always check the sodium content in the food label. Go for low salt foods that contain less than 120mg/100g of sodium.
- Food rich in soluble fibre, such as whole grain products (barley, oats, rye), fruits (apples, citrus) and legumes are associated with protecting

against heart disease and diabetes by lowering blood cholesterol and glucose level.

- Foods rich in calcium. Milk and milk products, almonds, oysters, small fish with bones such as sardines, mustard greens, bok choy, watercress, broccoli are good sources of calcium.
- Soy products – tofu, tempeh, soymilk, reduces Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol and raises HDL cholesterol level.
- Fish (grilled or baked) three times or more per week. Omega-3 fatty acids in fish are good for heart . Eating one to two servings of fish a week, reduces the risk of heart attack. Omega-3, a type of unsaturated fatty acid reduces the inflammation throughout the body. Salmon, herring and tuna are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids. Those who eat fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, three times or more per week, have a lower risk of silent brain lesions that can cause dementia and stroke. Flaxseed and oil, walnuts, canola oil, soybeans and soybean oil are the non-fish food options that are good sources of omega-3 fatty acids. Soy products – tofu, tempeh, soymilk, reduces LDL cholesterol and raises HDL cholesterol level.
- Limit the amount of fat you eat. Too much of fat can clog the arteries and add to weight problems. Choose vegetable, seed and nut oils rather than margarine and butter. Snack on fruit and vegetables.

Be flexible: Balance what you eat with physical activity. Research has shown that 30 minutes of physical activity every day will help to lower the blood pressure, lower cholesterol and to maintain a healthy weight. Obesity leads you to a risk of high cholesterol, high blood pressure and insulin resistance. People under stress may overeat. Having a regular physical activity will reduce the stress.