

Stroke Risk May Be Reduced By Making Small Changes In Habits, Study Finds

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It's no secret that a generally healthy lifestyle can help reduce a person's risk of getting a stroke. And now a new study shows that you can reduce your risk of stroke even further by making seven small changes in lifestyle habits.

The study, published in the American Heart Association journal *Stroke*, assessed stroke risk using the association's Life's Simple 7 health factors: be active, control cholesterol, eat a healthy diet, manage blood pressure, maintain a healthy weight, control blood sugar and don't smoke.

"We used the assessment tool to look at stroke risk and found that small differences in health status were associated with large reductions in stroke risk," said Dr. Mary Cushman, senior author and professor of medicine at the University of Vermont in Burlington, in a press release.

Researchers calculated stroke risk among nearly 23,000 black and white Americans aged 45 and older. Researchers then evaluated their risk of stroke by dividing the seven health factor scores into three categories: zero to four points for inadequate, five to nine points for average, and 10 to 14 points for optimum cardiovascular health.

During five years of follow-up, 432 strokes occurred among the participants. All seven factors played an important role in predicting stroke risk, but blood pressure was the

most important, according to the study. "Compared to those with poor blood pressure status, those who were ideal had a 60 percent lower risk of future stroke," Cushman said in a press release.

Cushman and her associates also found that people who didn't smoke or quit smoking more than a year before the start of the study had a 40 percent lower stroke risk.

People with optimum scores enjoyed a 48 percent lower stroke risk than those with inadequate scores, and those with average scores had a 27 percent lower risk.

Overall, African-Americans had lower scores than whites, but the connection between scores and stroke risk was similar for blacks and whites.

Cushman emphasized the need for African-Americans to focus on the above health factors since "blacks have nearly twice the stroke mortality rates as whites."

Stroke is a leading cause of death in the United States; more than 800,000 people die each year in the United States from heart disease and strokes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Lorie Eber is a NASM Certified Personal Trainer, Gerontologist and author. Lorie Eber Wellness Coaching provides one-on-one guidance and support to clients who are ready to make permanent lifestyle changes and lead a happier, healthier life.

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