Protecting Yourself and Your Children From Stroke

By Dr. Ramona Warren

It is estimated that one American dies from a stroke every four minutes, making stroke the fifth leading cause of death in America. While the highest death rates from stroke are typically amongst the elderly, recent statistics are showing stroke risk increasing in other age groups.

One recent study found the risk of stroke in middle-aged women between the ages of 35 and 54 had **tripled!** This staggering increase occurred despite the fact that more women are taking drugs to lower their cholesterol and blood pressure, which should ideally lower stroke risk. Studies also show the incidence of stroke as having increased up to 53 percent in those between the ages of 15 and 44. Even more disturbing is the marked increase of strokes in children 5 to 14 years of age. According to a study published in 2011 in the *Annals of Neurology,* a [51 percent increase in ischemic stroke incidence](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/233834.php) was found among those aged 5-14, especially in boys, from the period 1995-96 to 2007-08.

These statistics are shocking, especially when you consider the fact that up to 80 percent of strokes are preventable. The common thread in each of the age groups that lead to the increase incidence of strokes is obesity and diabetes. In just the last 10 years, middle-aged women’s waists have grown by nearly 2 inches, and their body mass index has risen from 27 to 29 percent. In fact, abdominal obesity rose an astounding twelve percent, from 47 percent to 59 percent.

Besides obesity, other risk factors for stroke include increased blood sugar levels, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking and low vitamin D levels. Almost half of the American population has at least one of these risk factors, however, many people are unaware they are at risk for a stroke. And, to complicate the matter, there often are no warning signs prior to a stroke.

There is good news, however. You can significantly decrease your risk of stroke simply by making better diet and lifestyle choices. Maintaining a healthy weight and a normal blood sugar are two of the most important things you can do. Make sure to eat a healthy diet consisting of vegetables and fruits (preferably organic), nuts, seeds and lean meats that are grass fed, free range or wild caught. To further help reduce risk avoid these foods:

1. **Trans fats.** These are found in most fast foods, fried foods, packaged and processed foods and are known to increase inflammation in the body.
2. **Smoked meats and processed meats.** These meats have sodium nitrate and nitrite. These include processed lunchmeats, bacon, hot dogs and salami to name a few. They cause damage to the blood vessels, as well as inflammation.
3. **Processed salt.** This is found in table salt and processed foods. However, natural sources of salt, such as Himalayan sea salt and quality sea salt, have many minerals that are beneficial. Choose a good salt source and keep your intake below one teaspoon a day.
4. **Diet soda.** Research presented at the American Stroke Association's International Stroke Conference showed that people who drink just [one diet soda a day may increase their risk of stroke by 48 percent](http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2011/03/04/new-diet-sodas-can-cause-strokes.aspx)!

Another factor associated with increased stroke risk is hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and birth control pills. Using synthetic progesterone and estrogen puts you at a higher risk for blood clots and stroke. Also stay aware of your vitamin D levels. Recent research has found that low levels of vitamin D doubles the risk for stroke and increases your risk for diabetes by up to 50 percent. And, finally, work to increase your activity levels by exercising regularly.

The American diet and sedentary lifestyle have led to the obesity epidemic, which is linked to the increase of stroke in all age groups. We don’t have to continue down this path of declining health. The choices we make determine our future, and each adult can choose to make healthier choices in diet and exercise. However, it is the children who are the innocent victims. They are dependent on adults to guide and teach them how to live and eat well. It is obvious from the alarming statistics impacting our children’s health that we are failing them. If we change our ways and our choices today, we can protect our children and grandchildren from a lifetime of disease tomorrow.