

Heart & Stroke

Stroke Month 2025 Backgrounder

June 3, 2025

What you don't know about stroke may surprise you

During Stroke Month, Heart & Stroke is sharing five facts everyone should know about stroke – but probably doesn't

Stroke can happen at any age.

- **Babies and young children** can have strokes. Risk of stroke in children is greatest in the first year of life, especially in the weeks surrounding their birth. Every day in Canada one baby has a stroke during this critical time period. More than 10,000 children (0 – 18 years) are living with stroke. Diagnosis of stroke in newborns and children is often delayed – usually taking longer compared to adults. Some newborns do not show symptoms for months or even years. In other cases, parents and healthcare providers do not always recognize the symptoms.
- **Teenagers and young adults** can have strokes.
- Stroke can happen during **pregnancy**. Although pregnancy-related stroke is relatively rare, during pregnancy 30 out of 100,000 women will experience a stroke, with risk highest just before or following delivery. During pregnancy women may develop certain conditions that put them at risk of heart conditions and stroke, including gestational high blood pressure and preeclampsia.
- **Age** is a risk factor for stroke – stroke risk increases as people get older. Approximately 80% of all strokes happen to those over the age of 60.

Learn the signs of stroke: heartandstroke.ca/FAST

Stroke is on the rise – but more people survive.

- According to the latest analysis based on a Heart & Stroke funded study there are now more than 108,000 strokes each year in Canada. That is roughly one stroke every five minutes.
- Stroke is on the rise in Canada due to an aging population and more younger people having strokes.
- Stroke in people under 60 (18-59 years) is linked to increases in risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and overweight/obesity. Additional emerging risk factors include air pollution, stress, and social determinants such as limited access to healthcare, food and housing. Better detection and diagnosis of more minor strokes may also be contributing to the increased numbers.
- Heart & Stroke funded research reveals that about one in 20 strokes in Canada occur in those under 45 years of age. Emerging evidence including Heart & Stroke funded research suggests that young women (under age 35) are at higher risk of stroke compared to men of the same age.
- Almost one million people in Canada are now living with stroke.
- The number of people surviving stroke has increased over the past several decades thanks to research breakthroughs and improvements in awareness, diagnosis, treatment and recovery.
- More than half of people in Canada have been touched by heart conditions or stroke. According to a poll commissioned by Heart & Stroke, six in 10 Canadians have themselves experienced or had someone close to them experience heart disease or stroke.*
- Although more people are surviving, stroke is still the fourth leading cause of death in Canada.
- Stroke is a leading cause of adult disability: About 60% of people who have had a stroke are left with some level of stroke-related disability and more than 40% of people who have a stroke are

left with moderate to severe disability. Yet according to a Heart & Stroke commissioned poll, one in three Canadians do not know that most people who have a stroke are left with some level of stroke-related disability.**

Learn more about risk factors for stroke: heartandstroke.ca/stroke/risk-and-prevention

Stroke is linked to heart health

- The heart and the brain are connected by the vascular system – a network of blood vessels that carry blood and oxygen throughout the body.
- Heart conditions like heart failure, congenital heart disease and atrial fibrillation can increase the risk of stroke – sometimes dramatically. Stroke can also increase the risk of heart conditions, for example, as many as one in five people may have a serious cardiac event, including cardiac arrest, in the days and weeks following their stroke. Although serious cardiac complications are most common in the months following a stroke, the risk can remain elevated into the long term.
- **Connections by the numbers:**
 - Congenital heart disease more than doubles the risk of **stroke**, especially among children and younger adults, who can have 10 times the risk.
 - People with heart failure are at increased risk of stroke, especially soon after diagnosis.
 - People with atrial fibrillation (abnormal heart rhythm) have double the risk of stroke.
 - People with aortic valve disease are at increased risk of stroke.
 - People who survive a cardiac arrest are at increased risk of stroke.
 - High blood pressure is the number one risk factor for stroke and a major risk factor for heart conditions.
- Heart and brain conditions have many of the same risk factors, and the impact of the connection is often cumulative: If you prevent one condition, you can prevent many others. Unfortunately, at the same time, if you develop one condition, you are at significantly higher risk of developing others.

Learn more about how to keep your brain and heart healthy: heartandstroke.ca/healthy-living

Stroke can be prevented.

- Keeping your heart and brain healthy and preventing stroke and heart disease starts with understanding your risks and knowing what can be done to manage them.
- Nine in 10 people in Canada have at least one risk factor for stroke or heart disease.
- As many as 8 in 10 cases (or 80%) of premature stroke or heart disease can be prevented through healthy lifestyle behaviours.
- Healthy lifestyle behaviours include being physically active, eating a healthy diet, being smoke-free, managing stress, maintaining a healthy weight, and limiting alcohol. Adopting these behaviours is easier for some than others.
- A risk factor is something that increases the likelihood of developing a condition or disease. Some medical conditions increase the risk for stroke and heart disease such as high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, obesity and atrial fibrillation. Medical risk factors can be managed with medication, treatment and making healthy lifestyle choices.
- Some risk factors cannot be controlled (often referred to as non-modifiable) such as age, ethnicity, family and medical history and sex and gender.
- Personal circumstances and social factors also affect brain and heart health such as socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, geography, body size, ability, and access to healthy food and health and other services and supports.
- According to a poll commissioned by Heart & Stroke, seven in 10 Canadians do not understand the risk factors for stroke or heart disease and seven in 10 Canadians mistakenly think that family history/genetics is the biggest risk factor for stroke and heart disease.**

Learn more about how to prevent stroke: heartandstroke.ca/stroke/risk-and-prevention

Knowing the FAST stroke signs saves lives.

- FAST is a simple way to remember the signs of stroke:
 - **F**ace – is it drooping?
 - **A**rms – can you raise both?
 - **S**peech – Is it slurred or jumbled?
 - **T**ime to call 9-1-1 right away.
- Anyone witnessing or experiencing any of the signs of stroke should call 9-1-1 or local emergency medical services (EMS) right away. Do not drive to the hospital, an ambulance will get you to the closest hospital that provides urgent stroke care. Lifesaving treatment begins the second you call 9-1-1.
- Recognizing the signs of stroke and acting quickly can mean the difference between life and death, or the difference between a better recovery and a lasting disability.
- The FAST signs are the most common signs of stroke, and they are more likely to be caused by stroke than any other condition.
- For a decade Heart & Stroke has been raising awareness around the need to act FAST when witnessing or experiencing stroke. Progress has been made as the number of Canadians who can name at least two FAST signs of stroke has **doubled** over the past ten years from two in 10 to more than four in 10.***
- Despite improvements over the past 10 years not enough Canadians recognize the FAST signs of stroke and know to call 9-1-1 right away if they witness or experience them and recognition varies across the country. According to the latest Heart & Stroke poll results more than three in 10 Canadians cannot name any of the FAST signs of stroke. This means one-third of the population are unaware of how to recognize the most common signs of this medical emergency.****
- Working with governments, corporate, community and health partners, Heart & Stroke has supported FAST campaigns across the country for the past ten years in various locations and across channels.

Learn more about the signs of stroke: heartandstroke.ca/FAST

**National, bilingual online poll of 2,005 Canadian residents 18 years and older, carried out June 25 – July 9, 2024 by Environics Research Group*

***National, bilingual online poll of 2003 Canadian residents 18 years and older, carried out May 29 - June 9 2023 by Environics Research Group*

****Heart & Stroke commissioned national, bilingual polls of Canadian residents 18 years and older conducted by Environics Research Group between 2015 – 2024.*

*****National, bilingual online poll of 3,824 Canadian residents 18 years and older, carried out Nov 13-Dec 17, 2024 by Environics Research Group.*

Definitions

A stroke happens when blood stops flowing to a part of the brain or bleed occurs in the brain, leading to death of brain cells. Strokes can be large or small, and the effects of stroke depend on the part of the brain affected and the extent of damage.

- **Ischemic stroke** is the most common form of stroke, caused by a blood clot.
Hemorrhagic stroke occurs when a blood vessel ruptures, causing bleeding in or around the brain.
A **transient ischemic attack (TIA)**, sometimes referred to as a mini-stroke, is caused by a small clot that briefly blocks an artery and stops blood flow. TIAs are an important warning that a more serious stroke may occur.

Heart & Stroke social handles and links

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- **EN:** @HeartandStroke (<https://twitter.com/HeartandStroke>)
- **FR:** @coeuretavc (<https://twitter.com/coeuretavc>)

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- **EN:** @heartandstroke (<https://www.facebook.com/heartandstroke>)
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Instagram

- @heartandstroke (<https://www.instagram.com/heartandstroke/>)

LinkedIn

- @heartandstroke (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/heart-and-stroke>)

heartandstroke.ca/stroke
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