

# Neurology for You

## Stroke in young adults

*You're not alone*

Stroke is not a disease of the old: it can happen at any age. It has a greater impact on children and young adults, particularly those who work, take care of their children or parents, and have many years of life left to live. Stroke occurs when a collection of *risk factors* and a *trigger* combine to form a blood clot that blocks the flow of oxygen and nutrients to a portion of the brain, causing irreversible damage. While stroke is a leading cause of *disability*, your symptoms may resolve, whether quickly and spontaneously, with the passage of time, or with physical or language rehabilitation. It is important to work with your Stroke Neurologist to identify your risk factors and triggers for stroke, manage those risk factors, maximize your chances for recovery, and minimize your risk of future strokes.



### How to prevent a second stroke

- Identify your risk factors (predisposing factors) with the help of a Stroke Neurologist. Learn how to manage each one.
- Get in the habit of taking medications regularly: your Neurologist may prescribe daily medications that dramatically reduce your risk of having a second stroke.
- Change your lifestyle: exercise regularly, moderate your diet and alcohol consumption, and stop smoking tobacco or marijuana.
- For women, it may be important to switch to a progesterone-only contraceptive (instead of one containing estrogen).

### WHAT ARE RISK FACTORS FOR STROKE IN YOUNG ADULTS?

Stroke can be prevented. There are predisposing factors that are more common or more important in young people than in older adults. These include:

- smoking* or tobacco use
- heavy alcohol consumption* or *binge drinking*
- illicit drug use* including cocaine, amphetamines, heroin, and natural and synthetic marijuana
- estrogen-containing contraception* for women
- pregnancy* (both during and after)
- migraines with aura*, a common headache syndrome accompanied by visual or sensory symptoms
- head or neck injury* or *neck manipulation*
- patent foramen ovale*, a small hole in the heart
- hypercoagulability*, or the tendency to form clots in the arteries or veins
- connective tissue diseases* which weaken blood vessels

Young adults can develop early stages of diseases often seen in older adults. These include:

- hypertension* or high blood pressure
- hypercholesterolemia* or high cholesterol
- diabetes mellitus* or uncontrolled blood sugar
- atherosclerosis*, the damaging and narrowing of arteries by the previous conditions
- atrial fibrillation*, an abnormal heart rhythm
- obstructive sleep apnea* when not treated
- physical inactivity* or lack of exercise
- obesity* or being overweight
- cancer*, which can increase the risk of forming clots

It is important to work with your Stroke Neurologist to help manage these risk factors and minimize your chances of having another stroke.