

*Many women at high risk for stroke don't realize it and are missing out on prevention measures, according to a new study*

Many women underestimate their stroke risk and overlook conditions that are putting them at risk, according to a study published April 1, 2009 in *Stroke: Journal of the American Stroke Association*. This lack of awareness means that opportunities to make changes and prevent a stroke are being missed, the researchers conclude.

Stroke is the No. 3 cause of death in the US (behind heart disease and cancer) and the No. 1 cause of serious, long-term disability. Over the course of a lifetime, 1 in 5 women will suffer a stroke—nearly **two-thirds of all stroke deaths happen in women**. Despite these alarming statistics, American women's awareness of their risk appears to be lacking.

In this study, researchers surveyed 215 women between 50 and 70 years of age who had at least one stroke risk factor. Only 16% of women with [heart disease](#) and 5% of women with [atrial fibrillation](#) (a common heart rhythm problem) realized that they were at risk for stroke. Fewer than half the women surveyed knew that lack of exercise, diabetes, and poor diet all increase your chances of having a stroke. There was some positive news: most women were able to identify high blood pressure, smoking, high cholesterol, and being overweight as conditions that raised stroke risk.

Knowing your overall stroke risk and what health conditions contribute to your risk are crucial to prevent a stroke: nearly all stroke risk factors can be controlled with appropriate lifestyle changes and medications. See [Preventing Stroke: the Basics](#) for the major factors that could be putting you at risk and what you can do about them.

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to calculate your personal stroke risk.

Knowledge of the warning signs of stroke was mixed in this study. Most women were able to identify problems speaking, weakness, or numbness as signs of a stroke, but only one in three knew that a stroke could also be signaled by vision changes, dizziness, headache, or confusion. Identifying stroke signs quickly is important because the longer you wait to get medical treatment the more damage occurs to the brain, and the lower your chances of surviving and making a full recovery. Make sure you and your family know the [Signs of Stroke](#) and know [what to do](#) if you notice them in yourself or a loved one.

**For Further Reading:**

[What is a Stroke?](#)

[Calculate Your Stroke Risk](#)

*Source: Dearborn JL, McCullough LD. Perception of Risk and Knowledge of Risk Factors in Women at High Risk for Stroke. Stroke. 2009;40:1181-6.*

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