

National Stroke Awareness Month Support Group Discussion Guide

National Stroke Awareness Month takes place in May every year. In honor of this special time, National Stroke Association strives to provide tools and inspiration to raise public awareness about stroke. As part of a Stroke Support Group, you have a platform from which you can help raise awareness about stroke.

The goal of National Stroke Awareness Month is to:

- **STOP** primary and secondary stroke through [risk factor management](#).
- **Act FAST** to increase recognition of and response to [stroke symptoms](#).
- **Spread HOPE** about [recovery from stroke](#).

What can you do in May?

Anyone can spread awareness and make an impact. Your Stroke Support Group can help educate other people about stroke in several ways. Consider:

- Encourage members to visit www.stroke.org/awareness for free downloadable materials and ideas for how to spread awareness.
- Share your story with others in your community or with newspaper or TV journalists.
- Pledge to educate a certain number of people before your next meeting about stroke awareness. Good places to start are church, school, and community groups.

National Stroke Association recently launched a campaign called **Come Back Strong**. **Come Back Strong** is founded in hope and survivorship and celebrates the opportunity that each stroke survivor has to rebuild. Please visit the website, www.comebackstrong.org, to learn more. There you will also be introduced to the **Comeback Trail 5K Series**. Hosting or participating in a **Comeback Trail** event is one way to raise awareness about stroke.

Useful Tools

Stroke 101

- Stroke is a brain attack, cutting off vital blood flow and oxygen to the brain.
- Types of Stroke:
 - Ischemic stroke occurs when arteries are blocked by blood clots or by the gradual build-up of plaque and other fatty deposits. About 87 percent of all strokes are ischemic.
 - Hemorrhagic stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain breaks, leaking blood into the

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brain. Hemorrhagic strokes account for 13 percent of all strokes, yet are responsible for more than 30 percent of all stroke deaths.

- The prevalence of transient ischemic attacks (TIA) increases with age. Up to 40 percent of all people who experience a TIA will go on to experience a stroke.
- Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in the United States, killing nearly 130,000 people each year, and a leading cause of serious, long-term adult disability.
- Approximately 795,000 strokes will occur this year.
- Approximately 55,000 more women than men have a stroke each year.
- Men's stroke incidence rates are greater than women's at younger ages, but not older ages.
- African-Americans are at greater risk for first-time stroke than whites.
- Two million brain cells die every minute during stroke, increasing risk of permanent brain damage, disability or death.

Stroke Strikes FAST. You Should Too. Call 9-1-1.

Few Americans know the symptoms of stroke. Learning them—and acting FAST when they occur—could save a life. Remember that: Stroke Strikes Fast. Call 9-1-1.

Use the FAST test for recognizing and responding to stroke symptoms:

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| F = FACE | Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop? |
| A = ARMS | Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward? |
| S = SPEECH | Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Does the speech sound slurred or strange? |
| T = TIME | If you observe any of these signs, call 9-1-1 or get to the nearest hospital. |

Common stroke symptoms include:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg – especially on one side of the body,
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding,
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes,
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination,

- Sudden severe headache with no known cause.

Reducing Stroke Risk

Stroke risk factors fall into two categories; controllable and uncontrollable. Some uncontrollable factors include age, race, gender and family history of stroke.

Stroke risk factors include:

Previous stroke	Diabetes
Previous episode of TIA or mini stroke	Carotid artery disease
High cholesterol and/or blood pressure	Smoking
Heart disease	Being overweight
Atrial fibrillation	Excessive alcohol consumption

Stroke Prevention Guidelines

- 1. Know your blood pressure.** Write it down. If it is elevated, work with your doctor to keep it under control. High blood pressure is a leading cause of stroke.
- 2. Find out if you have atrial fibrillation (AFib).** If you have AFib, work with your doctor to manage it. AFib can cause blood to collect in the chambers of your heart and can form clots and cause a stroke.
- 3. If you smoke, stop.** Smoking doubles the risk for stroke.
- 4. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation.** Drinking a glass of wine each day may lower your risk for stroke (provided that there is no other medical reason you should avoid alcohol). If you don't drink, don't start. Talk to your doctor about the interactions alcohol may have with the medications you are taking.
- 5. Know your cholesterol number.** Write it down. If it is high, work with your doctor to control it. Lowering your cholesterol may reduce your stroke risk.
- 6. Include exercise in the activities you enjoy in your daily routine.** If you are healthy, participate in moderate to vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise at least 40 minutes per day, three to



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four times per week.

8. Enjoy a lower sodium, lower fat diet. By cutting down on sodium and fat in your diet, you may be able to lower your blood pressure and, most importantly, lower your risk for stroke.

9. If you have any stroke symptoms, seek immediate medical attention—CALL 9-1-1.

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