# Strokes: 2 million reasons why every minute counts

By Linda Givens for the Union-Bulletin

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Nearly 800,000 Americans have a stroke each year. And in Washington state, stroke is the sixth-leading cause of death. Three major risk factors for stroke include high blood pressure, high cholesterol and smoking.

Strokes are typically caused by a blood clot that interrupts blood and oxygen flow to the brain. It can lead to loss of motor functions, dizziness and confusion, and a number of other health issues. When someone is having a stroke, the most important thing to do is act fast. The longer the brain goes without oxygen and inadequate blood flow, the more damage there is to the brain.

About 2 million brains cells die every minute during a stroke, so it's crucial that you and your loved ones can identify signs of stroke to avoid any additional harm it may cause to the brain.

Warning signs for stroke include:

Numbness in the face

Weakness or numbness in the arms or legs, especially on one side of the body

Trouble seeing out of one or both eyes

Trouble talking or understanding what others are saying

Severe headache for unknown reason or changes in vision

Confusion

Loss of coordination or balance

People can take steps to stop a stroke before it happens by controlling risk factors. Eighty-five percent of strokes could be prevented.

Health experts at Walla Walla General Hospital have some advice on how to reduce your risk of stroke:

Manage your blood pressure. Keep it under 120/80. High blood pressure damages the inside of blood vessels and is the leading risk factor for stroke.

Quit smoking. Smoking doubles your risk for stroke.

Control your cholesterol. Ask your health care provider about getting your cholesterol checked.

Exercise daily. Weight, diet and exercise are all important to your overall health.

Control blood sugar. If you have diabetes, work with your doctor to have a plan that works for you.

High blood sugar damages blood vessels.

Get regular health checkups. Talk with your doctor about your overall health and stroke risk.

Eat a healthy, balanced diet. Be sure to eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and high-fiber foods such as beans and whole grains.

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