Stroke carries a high risk of death. Survivors can experience loss of vision and/or speech, paralysis, and confusion. Historically called “apoplexy”, “stroke” is so called because of the way it strikes people down.

Previous stroke significantly increases risk of further episodes. Certain racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups are also at greater risk of stroke. The most important modifiable cause of stroke is high blood pressure; for every ten people who die of stroke, four could have been saved if their blood pressure had been regulated. Among those aged under 65, two-fifths of deaths from stroke are linked to smoking. Other modifiable risk factors include unhealthy diet, high salt intake, underlying heart disease, diabetes and high blood lipids.

The risk of death depends on the type of stroke: Transient ischemic attack or TIA — where symptoms resolve in less than 24 hours — has the best outcome, followed by stroke caused by carotid stenosis (narrowing of the artery in the neck that supplies blood to the brain). Blockage of an artery is more dangerous, with the most dangerous of all.

Even where advanced technology and facilities are available, 60% of those who suffer a stroke die or become dependent. Given these dismal statistics and the high cost of treatment of stroke, high priority should be accorded to preventive strategies.

### Deaths from stroke

Stroke is the second leading cause of death above the age of 60 years, and the fifth leading cause in people aged 15 to 59 years old.

**Predictors of death from stroke in Italy**

- Percentage increased risk of death from stroke in people aged 65 years and above 2001:
  - Previous stroke: 420%
  - Atrial fibrillation: 140%
  - High blood pressure: 84%
  - Impaired glucose tolerance: 83%
  - Cigarette smoking: 60%
  - Coronary heart disease: 38%

**In the USA, someone dies of a stroke every three minutes.**

Worldwide, 3 million women and 2.5 million men die from stroke every year.

Stroke is the third most common cause of death in developed countries, exceeded only by coronary heart disease and cancer.

**Struck down**

- Number of deaths from stroke 2002:
  - 200 000 and above: 1000–999
  - 100 000–199 999: below 1000
  - 10 000–99 999: no data

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*Note: The table and map in the image provide further statistical information on deaths from stroke worldwide.*

**Strokes compared with other causes of death**

- Total deaths: 57 million
  - Other causes: 27% (15.6 million)
  - Coronary heart disease: 13% (7.2 million)
  - CVD: 10% (5.5 million)
  - Respiratory infections: 7% (3.7 million)
  - Injuries: 9% (5.2 million)
  - Maternal: 2% (1.2 million)
  - Diarrhoeal diseases: 3% (1.6 million)
  - Perinatal: 4% (2.5 million)
  - Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: 5% (2.8 million)
  - Tuberculosis: 2% (1.2 million)

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*Image credits: Map adapted from World Health Organization*