

Healthy Living

Fact Sheet



High Fat Diet and Stroke

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What is a stroke?

A stroke, also called a cerebral vascular accident (CVA), is when a part of the brain is deprived of oxygen and the brain's cells die. Because the dead brain cells can no longer do their job, the area of the body under their control also fails to function as it should. The result is an inability to move a part of the body, or loss of feeling over a part of the body, or even loss of higher brain functions such as memory, speech, or intelligence.



Encouragement

"Dear friend, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul."

3 John 1:2 (NET)

What can deprive the brain of oxygen that can lead to a stroke?

The brain is very dependent on receiving adequate oxygen. Anything that compromises the brain's blood supply, or the blood's oxygen carrying ability, can lead to a stroke. Plaque in the arteries can block blood flow so that the brain does not get enough blood or oxygen. A high fat diet, one that would raise a person's cholesterol above normal, decreases the blood's oxygen carrying capacity and can lead to a stroke. If a person already has a deficit of blood flow to the brain due to blood vessels being blocked by plaque, and in addition they eat a high fat meal, the combination of poor blood flow to the brain and poor oxygen carrying capacity of the blood can lead to a more damaging stroke.



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Natural lifestyle approach

Dietary Considerations

Foods that lower the blood's oxygen carrying ability and increase the risk for plaque formation in brain blood vessels include: animal products, saturated fats, cooking oils, margarines, butter, refined sugar, and lard. A low salt diet also helps to prevent strokes.

A diet designed to improve blood flow and mental performance is a nutrient rich, complex carbohydrate diet consisting of: fresh fruit and vegetables, nuts and seeds (in moderation), grains and beans (free from grease and cooking oils). Foods especially helpful for improving blood flow to the brain include: pineapple, berries, grapes, grapefruit, flax seeds, chia seeds, walnuts, garlic, spinach, and organic soybeans.

Foods that help reverse plaque in the brain blood vessels include the dark green leafy vegetables, fresh fruits and vegetables, and naturally prepared nuts and seeds free from added oil(s).

Exercise

Exercise in the open air and sunlight improves brain blood circulation and lowers plaque-forming blood cholesterol levels. Vigorous exercise improves the brains capacity to learn and remember.

Water

Good hydration improves brain blood flow and performance. Three litres of water a day is recommended.

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Our Amazing Brain

We really have three brains in one!

We have been created with an amazing brain. We have a survival brain that is wired to send signals to the heart and adrenals. This ignites the fight or flight response to protect us when under threat and is unconscious so works on autopilot. It keeps us breathing, eating, sleeping etc. We also have an emotional brain where we store emotional and visual memories in the 5 senses. It is subconscious, doesn't have any time orientation, and doesn't know the difference between fact or fiction, truth or lies. It programs everything. Then we have the intelligence centre which is the thinking brain. This is conscious awareness in space and time that makes sense of the world. These three brains need to work together in balance to keep us healthy.

Encouragement

*"Fulfill my joy by
being like-minded,
having the same love,
being of one accord,
of one mind."*

Philippians 2:2 (NKJV)

Neuroplasticity – Our changing brain

Did you know that your brain is constantly changing and growing? After reading this you will have new brain cells and pathways with information you can store and retrieve. Our brain is neuroplastic, and like plasticine it can be shaped and molded. We have two main areas of the brain that grow new cells that are available for memory function. One is the Amygdala, which stores emotional memories, and the other is the Hippocampus which stores visual and conceptual memories. All memories (emotional and visual) are stored in the five senses, hence a memory can be triggered by any of the five senses. Even if we damage the brain it has the capacity to create new pathways and rewire itself. For example, if someone has a stroke and permanently damages the speech area of the brain they can learn to speak again because the brain could already do this function. However it doesn't repair the dead cells in this area, it builds a whole new speech center in another part of the brain. Now isn't that amazing! The brain is still an unknown frontier that science does not fully understand.

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Keep Your Brain Alive! Tool Kit

1. Growing and rewiring your brain

Our brain can grow trillions of new memory cells when we challenge the brain in positive ways. Like a computer it is the hard drive and we can add and store programs – just be careful what program you add and store!

- Exercise helps to grow trillions of brain cells available to create new pathways and memories.
- Socializing and having fun stimulates the growth of brain cells.
- Playing brain games (there's plenty of them on the internet) is a great way to grow your brain and stimulate brain function.
- Consciously work on a bad habit by putting in a new one and practice, practice, practice, as this rewires the brain and strengthens the new habit pathways.

2. Improving brain function: Use it or lose it!

Here are some great activities that can help challenge and improve brain function:

- Try new smells e.g. essential oils or flowers – wakes up your brain.
- Exercise in nature and focus on the leaves, trees, birds or sounds.
- Have fun, as laughter is the best medicine to get those endorphins (happy hormones) into the brain to help uplift the mood.
- Play with your children or with a pet. (If you don't have any, borrow them.)

3. Balancing brain function: Living in the present moment!

When we get depressed we are left brained and when hyper vigilant we are right brained; hence we need to balance left and right brain function to stay calm and focused in the present.

- Try doing a jigsaw puzzle, it helps to balance and synchronize both left and right brain functioning – a great activity to focus you in the present moment!
- Identify and work on changing any thought distortions as these upset brain balance – for example if you tend to project your fears and catastrophise, work on solving the problem in the present.
- Getting enough oxygen to the brain is a life saver – try doing slow, deep breathing, in through the nose and out through the mouth to the count of 5 –focus on the area of the heart as this calms and balances brain function.

Disclaimer: This fact sheet presents principles designed to promote good health and is not intended to take the place of personalised professional care. The opinions and ideas expressed are those of the writers.

Readers are encouraged to draw their own conclusions about the information presented.