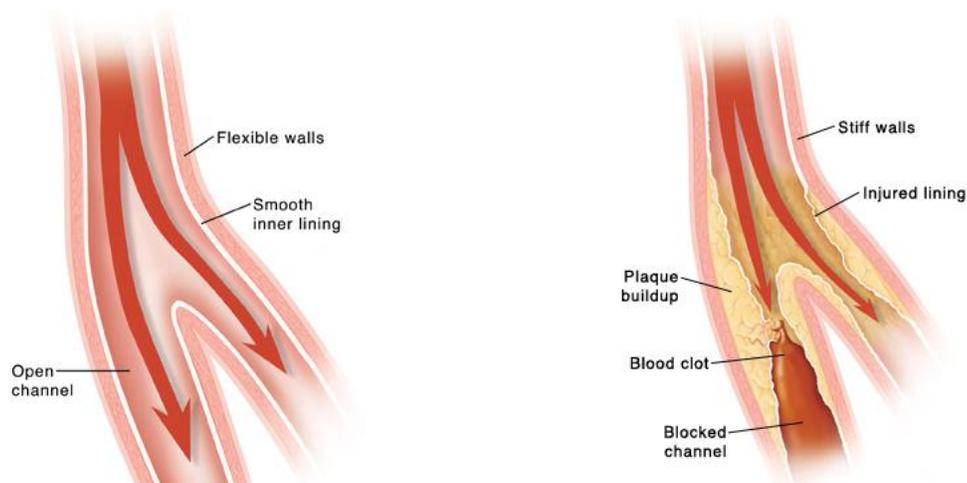


Stroke and Heart Disease

Every part of your body, including your heart and your brain, needs oxygen to work. Oxygen is carried in the blood. Blood vessels called arteries carry oxygen-rich blood throughout the body. Both heart attack and stroke are due to problems in the arteries. The same factors that cause heart disease can make you more likely to have a stroke.

- **Heart attack.** A heart attack is caused by blockage in an artery that carries blood to the heart muscle. If blood is blocked, that part of the heart muscle is damaged or dies.
- **Stroke.** If an artery supplying the brain is blocked, a stroke may result. This is called an ischemic stroke. It is caused by a piece of plaque breaking loose from an artery (such as a carotid artery in the neck) or from the heart and lodging in the brain. A stroke caused by the rupture of a weakened blood vessel is called a hemorrhagic stroke.

Both heart attack and stroke are medical emergencies that can lead to serious health problems. They can even be fatal.



Healthy artery

A healthy artery is a tube with flexible walls and a smooth inner lining. Blood flows freely through it.

Unhealthy artery

Artery problems start when the inner lining gets damaged. This is often due to risk factors such as smoking and high blood pressure. These can make the artery walls stiff. Plaque, a fatty mix of cholesterol and other material, forms in the lining. This narrows the channel. Plaque can break, restricting blood flow further. It can also cause a blood clot to form. A blood clot may block the artery's channel completely.

Reducing your risk

The good news: Making changes that make your arteries healthier will help lower your risk for both heart attack and stroke. If you have heart disease, you may need to work on a few aspects of your lifestyle. But remember that the things that are good for your arteries, heart, and brain are also good for the rest of your body.

Your health care provider will work with you to modify lifestyle factors as needed to help prevent progression of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease. This can lead to heart attack or stroke. Factors you may need to work on include:

- **Diet.** Your health care provider will give you information on dietary changes that you may need to make based on your situation. Your provider may recommend that you see a registered dietitian for help with diet changes. Changes may include:
 - Reducing fat and cholesterol intake
 - Reducing sodium (salt) intake, especially if you have high blood pressure
 - Increasing your intake of fresh vegetables and fruits
 - Eating lean proteins, such as fish, poultry, and legumes (beans and peas) and eating less red meat and processed meats
 - Using low- or no-fat dairy products
 - Using vegetable and nut oils in limited amounts
 - Limiting sweets and processed foods such as chips, cookies, and baked goods
- **Physical activity.** Your health care provider may recommend that you increase your physical activity if you have not been as active as possible. Depending on your situation, your provider may advise you to include moderate to vigorous intensity activity for at least 40 minutes each day for at least 3 to 4 days per week. Examples of moderate to vigorous activity include:
 - Walking at a brisk pace, about 3 to 4 miles per hour
 - Jogging or running
 - Swimming or water aerobics
 - Hiking
 - Dancing
 - Martial arts
 - Tennis
 - Riding a bike or a stationary bike
- **Weight management.** If you are overweight or obese, your health care provider will work with you to lose weight and lower your BMI (body mass index) to a normal or near-normal level. Making diet changes and increasing physical activity can help.
- **Smoking.** If you smoke, break the smoking habit. Enroll in a stop-smoking program to improve your chances of success.
- **Stress.** Learn stress management techniques to help you deal with stress in your home and work life.

