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## RISK FACTOR CONTROL HELPS GUARD AGAINST STROKE 113

Untreated high blood pressure is a stroke against you when it comes to stroke risks, according to the American Heart Association.

"Changing health habits to control high blood pressure is the most important step in reducing the risk of stroke, says Roger Peck, M.D., president of the Kansas Affiliate, Inc. of the American Heart Association.

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel bringing oxygen and nutrients to the brain bursts or becomes clogged. As a result, the nerve cells in that part of the brain cannot function either.

Stroke affects 500,000 Americans per year and claims the lives of nearly 150,000 of these victims. This makes stroke the third leading killer in the country.

"Everyone should get his or her blood pressure checked and those with high blood pressure should work with their doctors to keep it under control," Dr. Peck said. "Controlling high blood pressure will probably mean losing weight and exercising, reducing salt in the diet, or taking drugs the doctor

may prescribe."

More effective control of high blood pressure has played a big part in the 40.2 percent decline in mortality due to stroke since 1976, but Dr. Peck warns that not all stroke victims have high blood pressure.

"In addition to high blood pressure, the AHA has identified four other well documented treatable risk factors: heart disease; the presence of temporary mini-strokes, called transient ischemic attacks; a high level of red blood cells; and possibly diabetes," Dr. Peck said.

The presence of heart disease such as coronary heart disease, congestive heart failure, enlargement of the heart muscle or disturbances in the rhythm of the heartbeat can double a person's chance of stroke. For this reason, the AHA recommends other lifestyle changes that will decrease the risk of coronary heart disease and in turn, stroke.

"Americans should reduce cholesterol and saturated fats in their diets, quit smoking, reduce alcohol intake and maintain ideal body weight by proper nutrition and exercise," Dr. Peck said. "These risk factors can promote atherosclerosis, a build-up of fats and cholesterol in

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the blood vessels, which may lead to stroke."

Diabetes can increase the risk of stroke, especially for women. Sickle cell disease, prevalent among black Americans can also increase the risk of stroke.

Dr. Peck said American should be aware of the risk factors that cannot be changed or treated. Elderly Americans are more susceptible to stroke, as the occurrence of stroke doubles every 10 years for persons over 55. The chance of stroke is about 30 percent higher in men than women.

People with a family history of high blood pressure are more likely to have high blood pressure and consequently a stroke. Statistics also show that black Americans have higher death rates from strokes than white Americans. This may be a result of the greater prevalence of high blood pressure among blacks.

"It's wise for each American to know about the risk factors - and to alter the ones that can be changed," Dr. Peck said. "Be aware of the warning signs

your body sends you and see your doctor when you're not sure what your body is telling you."

For more information on stroke and its risk factors, contact your local American Heart Association office.