



Catholic Healthcare West

**Ask the Expert**  
*Arizona Republic*

**Dorothy McClure, R.N.**

**Q: How do I know if I am risk for having a stroke?**

**A:** A stroke happens when blood flow to the brain is disrupted, which can be caused by a blocked artery or bleeding in the brain. Even if the blood and oxygen flow is disrupted for a small amount of time, brain cells die causing brain damage. The damaged area of the brain may cause impaired ability with movement, speech, thinking and memory, bowel and bladder, eating, emotional control and other vital body functions.

According to the National Stroke Association (NSA), up to 80 percent of all strokes can be prevented. May is Stroke Awareness Month, and it's important to know the signs and symptoms associated with a stroke. Call 9-1-1 immediately if you have one or more of these signs:

- Weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg.
- Confusion or difficulty speaking or understanding.
- Problems with vision.
- Dizziness or problems with balance or coordination.
- Severe headache.

It's also important to know the factors that put you at risk for having a stroke. The NSA outlines controllable risk factors as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, tobacco use and smoking, alcohol, physical inactivity and obesity. By keeping all of these risk factors under control, you can lower your risk of having a stroke. Risk factors you cannot control include your age, gender, race, family history or having suffered from a previous stroke.

To find out if you're at risk for heart disease or stroke, log on to [HeartAwareTest.com](http://HeartAwareTest.com) to take the free HeartAware™ online evaluation offered by Chandler Regional and Mercy Gilbert Medical Centers. The test takes less than seven minutes to complete and may just save your life.

*Dorothy McClure, R.N., is the cardiac clinician for Catholic Healthcare West's HeartAware™ program. To learn more about HeartAware™, or to arrange for a free, in-person consultation, please visit [heartawaretest.com](http://heartawaretest.com) or call 480.728.3639.*