Four ways to prevent a stroke

Eating foods high in potassium, like bananas, may reduce your risk by more than 20 percent.

Every 40 seconds, someone in the United States has a stroke; about every four minutes, someone dies from one. If you stop smoking, cut your sodium intake and keep your weight, blood pressure and blood sugar in check, you reduce your risk. Here are four more tips, based on the latest research:

Pay attention to palpitations especially if the flutters are accompanied by shortness of breath, lightheadedness and chest pain—signs of atrial fibrillation, an abnormal and often rapid heartbeat that boosts risk of stroke about five-fold. A new study in the journal Circulation suggests about half of AF cases could be prevented by curbing heart risk factors such as obesity and smoking.

Eat more raisins and bananas, beans and sweet potatoes, which are loaded with potassium. A diet rich in such foods may reduce stroke risk by more than 20 percent, a recent report says.

Take a walk for 20 minutes It'll cut your risk of stroke by 30 percent, according to a large study of almost 40,000 women conducted during a 12-year period. Walk briskly (briskly enough so you can talk, but not sing) and your chances are cut by almost 40 percent.

Get your eyes checked A new study found retinal vein occlusion, an eye disease that afflicts about 180,000 people each year, nearly doubles your chance of stroke. RVO occurs when small veins that carry blood away from the retina become blocked; atherosclerosis, diabetes and high blood pressure raise your risk.

In addition, preliminary research in the Netherlands suggests older people with advanced macular degeneration appear to be at an increased risk for bleeding stroke (the kind caused by a brain hemorrhage.)