

More women than men having mid-life stroke

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More women than men appear to be having a stroke in middle age, according to a study published June 20, 2007, in the online edition of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology. Researchers say heart disease and increased waist size may be contributing to this apparent mid-life stroke surge among women.

For the study, researchers analyzed data from 17,000 people over the age of 18 who participated in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Of the participants, 606 people experienced a stroke.

The study found women in the 45 to 54 age range were more than twice as likely as men in the same age group to have had a stroke. There were no sex differences in stroke rates found in the 35 to 44 and the 55 to 64 age groups.

“While our analysis shows increased waist size and coronary artery disease are predictors of stroke among women aged 45 to 54, it is not immediately clear why there is a sex disparity in stroke rates among this age group,” said study author Amytis Towfighi, MD, with the Stroke Center and Department of Neurology at the University of California at Los Angeles, and member of the American Academy of Neurology.

“While further study is needed, this mid-life stroke surge among women suggests prompt and close attention may need to be paid to the cardiovascular health of women in their mid-30s to mid-50s with a goal of mitigating this burden.”

In addition, Towfighi says several vascular risk factors including systolic blood pressure and total cholesterol levels increased at higher rates among women compared to men in each older age group.

“For instance, with each decade, men’s blood pressure increased by an average of four to five points, whereas women’s blood pressure increased by eight to 10 points. Similarly, men had significantly higher total cholesterol levels than women at age 35 to 44, but men’s total cholesterol remained stable while women’s total cholesterol increased by 10 to 12 points with each decade, so that by age 55 to 64, women had significantly higher total cholesterol than men,” said Towfighi.

Towfighi says the study also found a greater than expected stroke surge among men who were nearing the end of middle age. Men aged 55 to 64 were three times more likely than men aged 45 to 54 to have had a stroke. Towfighi says the reasons behind this increase warrant further investigation.

Source: American Academy of Neurology

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