

Young adults' beliefs about their health clash with risky behaviors

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The results are part of a survey of 1,248 Americans ages 18-44 on their attitudes about health, including influences of and beliefs about health behaviors and their risks for stroke.

Stroke is a leading cause of death and disability in America.

Eight in 10 people between ages 25-44 years old believe they're living healthy lifestyles and are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors than 18-24 year olds participating in the survey.

"This survey shows the dangerous disconnect that many young Americans have about how their behaviors affect their risks for stroke and other cardiovascular diseases," said Ralph Sacco, M.D., neurologist and president of the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association. "Starting healthy behaviors at a young age is critical to entering middle age in good shape. The investment you make in your health now will have a large payoff as you age. We want everyone – especially young people – to strive to avoid stroke, which can affect anyone at any age."

People who make healthy lifestyle choices lower their risk of having a first stroke by as much as 80 percent compared with those who don't make healthy choices, according to [American Heart Association](#) /American Stroke Association guidelines released in December. The healthy behaviors include eating a low-fat diet high in fruits and vegetables, drinking alcohol and sugar-sweetened beverages in

moderation, exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy body weight and not smoking.

Most 18-24 year olds said they want to live long and maintain quality health throughout their life. On average, they want to live to age 98. Yet, one-third of those surveyed don't believe engaging in healthy behaviors now could affect their risk of stroke in the future and 18 percent could not identify at least one stroke risk factor.

"Young adults need to make a connection between healthy behaviors and a healthy brain and healthy heart," Sacco said. "If we are not able to help young adults understand the relevance of their actions now and their risk of stroke tomorrow, then we could be looking at an increase in stroke diagnoses and deaths within the next 10 to 20 years."

"Everyone should recognize the severity of stroke, which threatens quality of life and can be prevented. People need to think in terms of striving for ideal health as well as surviving and thriving if a stroke occurs. An easier way to remember this is: Strive, Survive and Thrive," Sacco added.

Results from the survey also revealed that as people age, they become more aware of their overall health and risk factors for heart disease and stroke:

- Among 35-44 year olds, only 22 percent said they were not concerned about cardiovascular diseases and conditions, including heart disease/heart attack; high blood pressure; obesity; high cholesterol; diabetes; and stroke. Yet, about half (48 percent) of them are more likely to have health concerns they struggle with today.

- Thirty-six percent of 25-34 year olds said they were not concerned about cardiovascular diseases and conditions.
- Forty-three percent of 18-24 year olds were least concerned about [cardiovascular disease](#).
- All groups said that they're least worried about stroke as a personal health threat

Long life with quality health is also a goal of many 25-44 year olds. The average age this group wishes to reach is 91. If they continue to live healthfully, they will have a better chance of reaching that goal than those under 25.

Stroke occurs when a blood vessel in or leading to the brain bursts or is blocked by a blood clot. When this happens, part of the brain can't get the blood or oxygen it needs, so it starts to die. Depending on the severity of the stroke, immobility or paralysis may occur. In the United States, someone suffers a [stroke](#) every 40 seconds.

Provided by American Heart Association

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