

Teenage stroke -- a frightening trend

August 25 2011, By Kathy Morrison

Stroke has generally been considered a disease of the elderly, but the incidence of stroke in children and teens has increased in recent years. The American Heart Association Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics 2011 Data indicate that the unhealthy behaviors that are the risk factors for stroke begin with school-aged children.

The following statistic may offer insight into this increase:

- [Prevalence of obesity](#) in ages 12-19 has risen in the past 25 years from 5 percent to 17 percent.
- Type 2 diabetes, a disease that once was seen only in older adults, is present in 15 percent of overweight children.
- [High blood pressure](#) is at an unprecedented level for children aged 3 to 18.
- Abnormal [cholesterol levels](#) in ages 12-19 is 30 percent.

If these risk factors are not addressed quickly, children born since the year 2000 may not outlive their parents.

To add to this challenge, teenagers do not realize that they are at risk for stroke and generally do not understand the life-long implications of unhealthy lifestyle choices.

Behaviors such as smoking tobacco, exposure to secondhand smoke, and marijuana and alcohol use add to their risk. The use of [birth control pills](#) in combination with smoking puts teenage girls at much greater risk for stroke.

A recent study of children and teens with risk factors of obesity and [high cholesterol](#) revealed a vascular age 30 years older than their actual age. The study director, cardiologist Geetha Raghuvver, reported that the average age of the study group was 13 years, while the average age of their carotid arteries (arteries that supply blood to the brain) was 45 years.

With control of risk factors, 80 percent of strokes could be prevented. So what can parents do?

- Become a role model for healthy lifestyle choices. Continue your own exercise plan; demonstrate moderation in alcohol intake; and do not smoke.
- Limit the availability of high-calorie foods and snacks at home.
- Limit sugared soft drinks and juices, fast food and high-fat foods.
- Establish TV- and computer-free time to make time for physical activity.
- Establish family meal time with healthy menus. Focus on high-fiber whole grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables. Limit portion sizes.
- Develop family activities and hobbies that involve physical activity.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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