

Study shows risk factor prevention should be addressed at all ages

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Prevention of cardiovascular disease in mid- to later life in black and white Americans is an increasingly important health concern, according to a study from the Reasons for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke project recently published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

University of Alabama at Birmingham investigators and their colleagues found that the development of risk factors including hypertension, diabetes and high cholesterol remains high in adults over age 45, even extending up to ages over 75 years. In addition, the development of these risk factors was 25 to 100 percent higher in the black population than in the white population.

"Much of the attention on prevention of risk factors has been focused on young people. We have shown that there is a high risk of developing risk factors, particularly for blacks, even among the elderly population," said George Howard, Dr.P.H., lead author of the study and professor in the UAB School of Public Health Department of Biostatistics. "It is important that [health care professionals](#) educate people of all ages on what they need to be doing to prevent these risk factors for stroke and heart disease."

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke-funded study showed that, among persons over age 45 with good blood pressure levels, about 40 percent of whites and 50 percent of blacks developed [high blood pressure](#) over a 10-year period. Similarly, of those who did

not have diabetes at the beginning of the study, about 15 percent of whites and 20 percent of blacks over age 45 developed diabetes in the 10-year period.

Blacks have a strikingly higher risk of both stroke and [heart attack](#) compared to whites. About half of the difference in risk is due to a larger proportion of the black population having these risk factors.

"This study underscores the important message that preventing the development of risk factors is important across the entire lifespan, and [cardiovascular disease](#) prevention needs to be addressed at all ages," Howard said. "If we can prevent the development of [risk factors](#) no matter a person's age, it will significantly reduce the chance of a person having a stroke or heart attack."

More information: George Howard et al. Racial Differences in the Incidence of Cardiovascular Risk Factors in Older Black and White Adults, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.14472](#)

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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