

As one spouse's blood pressure rises, so does the other's: Study

December 6 2023, by Ernie Mundell



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In sickness and in health—and in blood pressure, too? A new international study finds that if your blood pressure rises with time, your spouse's might, also.

"Many people know that high [blood pressure](#) is common in middle-aged and [older adults](#), yet we were surprised to find that among many [older couples](#), both husband and wife had high blood pressure in the U.S., England, China and India," said study senior author Dr. Chihua Li, a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Michigan.

"For instance, in the U.S., among more than 35% of couples who were ages 50 or older, both had high blood pressure," Li said in a news release from the American Heart Association (AHA).

Li's team published its findings Dec. 6 in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*.

High blood pressure is a common complaint among Americans, and the risk of hypertension rises with age. According to the AHA, almost half (about 47%) of adult Americans had high blood pressure in 2020, and it contributed to 120,000 deaths that year.

In the new study, Li and colleagues looked at rates of high blood pressure among nearly 34,000 [heterosexual couples](#) worldwide: 4,000 U.S. couples, 1,100 couples in England, more than 6,500 Chinese couples and over 22,000 Indian couples.

Data was collected between 2015 and 2019, depending on the country.

High blood pressure was defined as systolic (the upper number in a reading) blood pressure higher than 140 mm Hg or diastolic greater than 90 mm Hg, as measured by health professionals.

Study co-lead author Jithin Sam Varghese said the team "wanted to find out if many [married couples](#) who often have the same interests, living environment, lifestyle habits and [health outcomes](#) may also share high blood pressure."

The research seemed to support that notion: "The prevalence of both spouses or partners having high blood pressure was about 47% in England; 38% in the U.S.; 21% in China and 20% in India," according to the AHA news release.

The results didn't seem to vary regardless of a couple's income, age, education or how long they'd been married.

"Ours is the first study examining the union of high blood pressure within couples from both high- and [middle-income countries](#)," noted Varghese, an assistant research professor at the Emory Global Diabetes Research Center in Atlanta.

Fortunately, there are many things individuals *and* couples can do to avoid [high blood pressure](#), one expert said.

"Making [lifestyle changes](#), such as being more active, reducing stress or eating a healthier diet, can all reduce blood pressure; however, these changes may be difficult to achieve and, more importantly, sustain if your spouse or partner [and greater family unit] are not making changes with you," said Bethany Barone Gibbs.

She's chair of the department of epidemiology and biostatistics at the School of Public Health at West Virginia University, and she also helped devise the AHA's recent guidelines on exercise and blood pressure.

More information: Jithin Sam Varghese et al, Spousal Concordance of Hypertension Among Middle-Aged and Older Heterosexual Couples Around the World: Evidence From Studies of Aging in the United States, England, China, and India, *Journal of the American Heart Association* (2023). [DOI: 10.1161/JAHA.123.030765](https://doi.org/10.1161/JAHA.123.030765)

Citation: As one spouse's blood pressure rises, so does the other's: Study (2023, December 6)
retrieved 29 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-12-spouse-blood-pressure.html>

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