Stroke rates are rising, especially among the young

May 24 2024, by Ernie Mundell
The rate at which Americans under the age of 65 suffered a stroke rose by about 15% between 2011 and 2022, new government data shows. The study is published in the journal *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

That was true even among the young: The rate of stroke jumped 14.6% among people ages 18 to 44 during the study period, researchers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found.

It's not clear why stroke rates have risen so sharply, but rising rates of obesity and high blood pressure are likely contributing factors.

Another reason could be that people are better now at spotting the signs of a stroke, said a team led by Yui Fujii, of the CDC's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention.

"Better recognition of stroke signs and symptoms might have potentially contributed to increased stroke prevalence, because earlier stroke treatment contributes to improved outcomes" and more survivors, his team said.

Stroke remains the fifth leading cause of death in the United States. According to the National Institutes of Health, each year 795,000 Americans will suffer a stroke, and about 137,000 will die.

In the new report, Fujii's group tracked 2011–2022 data from a U.S. national health surveillance system to spot trends in stroke incidence among Americans aged 18 and older.

Overall, stroke increased by 7.8% among Americans during those 11 years, the data showed.
The rate of stroke among seniors remained largely unchanged, with 7.7% suffering one in 2011 and the same number being afflicted in 2022.

The big change was seen among the young.

For example, stroke rose by 15.7% among people ages 45 to 64 over the study period, with 3.3% reporting a stroke in 2011 and 3.8% reporting one in 2022.

Among even younger folk—those ages 18 to 44—strokes rose by 14.6%, from 0.8% of people in this age group in 2011 to 0.9% by 2022, the researchers said.

Race seemed key, as well: Black Americans had a 7.8% rise in stroke incidence over the study period, and the rise was even steeper for Hispanic Americans, at 16.1%. White Americans charted a 7.1% rise.

As education levels fell, stroke rates increased, Fujii's team added.

The odds of a young adult having a stroke are still very small, but the rise is troubling and seems tied to a concurrent rise in stroke risk factors—especially obesity.

"From 1999–2000 to 2017–2018, obesity prevalence among males increased from 27.5% to 43% and among females from 33.4% to 41.9%; [obesity] prevalence during 2017–2018 was highest among those aged 40–59 years [44.8%]," the researchers noted.

Rates of high blood pressure (which is often tied to obesity) among the middle-aged are also rising. According to the researchers, hypertension rose from "40.3% during 1999–2000 to 46.8% during 2017–2018." Stroke risk tends to rise as blood pressure numbers get higher.
Finally, the opioid epidemic may be a culprit in some strokes among the young. Opioid addiction can leave even young people vulnerable to a stroke-related heart condition called infective endocarditis, the researchers noted.

Reducing any of these risk factors is crucial to bringing stroke numbers down again. In the meantime, recognizing the signs of a stroke in yourself or someone nearby can speed treatment and prevent death and disability.

According to Fujii's team those signs are what's known as F.A.S.T.:

- **Face**: Does one side of the face droop when smiling?
- **Arms**: Does one arm drift downward when both arms are raised?
- **Speech**: Is speech slurred or strange when repeating a simple phrase?
- **Time**: If you see any of these signs, call 9-1-1 right away.

"Acting F.A.S.T is key to stroke survival," the researchers said. "Awareness and knowledge of stroke signs and symptoms have increased among U.S. adults, although there is room for improvement."


Copyright © 2024 HealthDay. All rights reserved.