Medical Xpress

Young obese women could reduce their stroke risk

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Sophia Antipolis, 29 October 2013: The global campaign to tackle stroke is highlighted today on World Stroke Day with the slogan "Because I care…". The phrase showcases the role of caregivers in supporting people who have suffered a stroke and aims to correct misinformation about the disease, such as the misconception that stroke only happens later in life.

Every other second, stroke attacks a person, regardless of age or gender. Of the 15 million people who experience a stroke each year, six million do not survive. Worldwide about 30 million people have had a stroke and most have residual disabilities. Recent data published in the Lancet, shows a striking 25% increase in the number of stroke cases in people aged 20 to 64, worldwide (1). This younger age group now accounts for 31% of stroke cases (up from 25% before 1990).

But stroke can be prevented, treated and managed in the long term. The campaign theme "Because I care" emphasises these areas. See http://www.worldstrokecampaign.org/2012/About/Pages/WorldStrokeDay2013.aspx

Research presented at ESC Congress 2013 showed that there are plenty of steps young obese women can take to reduce their risk of stroke (2). The research found that in young women without metabolic disorders (high blood pressure or abnormal glucose metabolism in relation to or outside pregnancy, or high cholesterol), being overweight or obese did not increase the chance of having a stroke compared to normal weight

women without metabolic disorders. But the risk of stroke increased by 3.5 times in women who were overweight or obese and had metabolic disorders.

Study author, Dr Michelle Schmiegelow from Denmark, said: "Obesity puts young women at a major risk of developing high blood pressure, diabetes or high cholesterol, which dramatically increases their likelihood of having a stroke. Young women who are overweight or obese probably have a window of opportunity to lose weight and keep a healthy lifestyle so that they reduce their risk of getting high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol. In this way they can protect themselves from having a stroke or heart attack."

ESC spokesperson Professor Gregory Lip said: "Overall women get more strokes than men each year, mainly because stroke occurs more frequently at older ages and women generally live longer than men. Thus, approximately 55 000 more women than men have strokes each year. Awareness of important risk factors, such as atrial fibrillation (an irregularity of the heart rhythm) and high blood pressure, is crucial. Of note, women are twice more likely to die from a stroke than breast cancer each year."

ESC spokesperson Professor Joep Perk said: "Women are at the same risk of stroke as men, and the level of risk is completely steered by the underlying risk factor pattern they have. The majority of people who have a stroke are disabled for the rest of their lives and may be paralysed or lose their ability to speak. The devastating consequences of this disease for patients and their loved ones make prevention even more important."

He added: "Prevention for all cardiovascular disease follows the same pattern, be it stroke, heart attack, or peripheral arterial disease. Step one for women is absolutely to stop smoking – that beats everything. The

second most important thing is to know your blood pressure to see if you are at risk. And finally, adopt healthy behaviours like eating heart healthy food and keeping the amount of salt you eat under control."

The global campaign against stroke asks people to commit to six stroke challenges:

- Know your personal risk factors: high blood pressure, diabetes, and high blood cholesterol
- Be physically active and exercise regularly
- Maintain a healthy diet high in fruit and vegetable and low in salt and keep blood pressure low
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Avoid cigarette smoke. If you smoke, seek help to stop now
- Learn to recognise the warning signs of a stroke and how to take action.

More information: www.thelancet.com/journals/lan … (13)61953-4/abstract

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