

Stroke on the rise for teens

According to consumer health information site www.itsmyhealth.com.au, if you thought strokes only affected old people – think again. In a disturbing study that shows just how bad our lifestyles really are, US researchers have found a 37% rise in the number of teenagers and young adults hospitalised for strokes.

The research from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) looked at hospitalisation rates between 1995-2008 for people aged between 15-44.

Not only did they find the increase in ischaemic stroke rates (strokes caused by a clot or blocked blood vessel) but also noted a rise in the risk factors for strokes.

The findings published in the *Annals of Neurology*, showed an increase in hypertension, diabetes, obesity, lipid (cholesterol) disorders and smoking over the 14 year study period.

Ischaemic strokes are caused by a blockage of blood flow to the brain because of blood clots or the build up of fatty deposits inside the blood vessel. Lifestyle factors such as smoking, poor diet and lack of exercise can contribute to development of these fatty build ups.

Dr Mary George, lead author of the study and a medical officer with CDC's Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention said "Our results ... accentuate the need for public health initiatives to reduce the prevalence of risk factors for stroke among adolescents and young adults."

And it's advice Australia should take note of. According to the National Stroke Foundation (Australia), stroke is the second most common cause of death in Australia and a leading cause of disability.

Of the patients hospitalised for ischaemic stroke, the study found that nearly one in three people aged 15 to 34 years and over half aged 35 to 44 years also had high blood pressure.

A quarter of those aged 35 to 44 years had diabetes and about one third smoked. Other common health problems included obesity and high cholesterol.

All of these are risk factors for stroke and heart disease which can be managed with lifestyle changes.

A healthy diet and lifestyle habits can help prevent the onset of stroke and other heart diseases. This includes eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, less salt and saturated fats, not smoking, and engaging in regular physical activity.

The National Stroke Foundation (Australia) also recommends that people should learn to recognise the signs of strokes, as early detection can make a vast difference in outcome.

These include severe headache, changes in speech such as slurring, losing consciousness or feeling dizzy or light-headed.

Contacts

Katherine Craig

02 9422 8838

mailto:katherine.craig@reedbusiness.com.au