
U.S. Hypertension Rates Rising

By Joene Hendry

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - A comparison of U.S. hypertension rates over a decade indicates there has been an 18-percent relative increase.

Much of this increase is attributable to an upward trend in hypertension rates among women, report Dr. Jeffrey Cutler and colleagues at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute in Bethesda, Maryland.

Hypertension is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Prevention involves lifelong dietary and lifestyle changes to improve body weight and to eliminate other cardiovascular risk factors such as high cholesterol and smoking, Cutler told Reuters Health.

His group compared hypertension rates reported in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys conducted between 1988 through 1994 and again from 1999 through 2004. The investigators also assessed rates of awareness, treatment, and control, reported by the 16,351 and 14,430 US-living adults who, respectively, participated in the surveys.

The findings show that the overall age-standardized prevalence of hypertension increased from 24.4 percent to 28.9 percent, with the largest increases seen among non-Hispanic-white women, Cutler's team reports in the medical journal Hypertension.

While reports of high blood pressure significantly increased among non-Hispanic-white women 40 years and older, it did not increase until age 60 years and older among non-Hispanic-white men or non-Hispanic-black men and women.

Among Mexican-American men and women, hypertension prevalence did not significantly increase nor did the rates of awareness, treatment, or control generally seen in other groups, Cutler and colleagues report.

Among men, increased body weight appears to account for most of the increase in hypertension prevalence, however overweight only accounts for part of the increase among women.

Prevalence depends on the rate of new cases and on survival, said Cutler. Gender differences may represent men's "catch-up" in awareness, treatment, and control; women's suspected sensitivity "to the blood pressure raising effects of salt;" or may reflect changes in life circumstances, "such as availability of employer-sponsored health insurance," he surmised.

Taken together, these findings highlight the need for better understanding of impeding factors toward improved control of blood pressure, the researchers conclude.

SOURCE: Hypertension, November 2008.



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