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Hospitalizations for Spikes in Blood Pressure Are on the Rise



Despite a nationwide effort to control blood pressure, the number of seniors hospitalized for a sudden, sharp rise in blood pressure surged over the last two decades in the United States. The largest increase was among Black Americans, with the highest rates in the South, new research shows.

The aim of the study was to “evaluate whether we have made any progress in the last 20 years about preventing hospitalization for acute hypertension. And the answer is no,” lead study author Yuan Lu. She’s an assistant professor of cardiovascular medicine at Yale University’s Center for Outcomes Research and Evaluation (CORE) says.

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The analysis of data on Medicare beneficiaries older than 65 found that hospitalizations for these severe jumps in blood pressure more than doubled between 1999 and 2019

The overall annual hospitalization rate for high blood pressure emergencies increased by 5.6% during that time, but increased by 6% among Black people. Black patients also had a three times higher rate of hospitalization between 2017 and 2019, according to the study.

“In this paper we looked at hospitalizations for acute hypertension, including hypertension emergency and urgency. These marked elevations in blood pressure require attention and interventions immediately, otherwise they could lead to target organ damage, including heart attack and stroke,” Lu says in a university news release.

Stress Can Kill: Hypertension In Black Americans

An effort to eliminate racial disparities

The finding that the hospitalization rate for blood pressure spikes is highest in the South is consistent with what is called a “stroke belt” in the medical literature, she adds.

“What is most striking is the rapid increase in racial disparities of hospitalization for acute hypertension between Black and white beneficiaries, with Black people persistently having the higher rates during the last 20 years,” study co-author Dr. Harlan Krumholz says in the release.

“This occurred in a time when there has been a tremendous increase in health care spending and important national efforts to eliminate disparities,” Krumholz, a professor of medicine and director of CORE shares.

“The lack of progress in reducing racial disparities in hospitalizations for acute hypertension highlight the need for new approaches to address both medical and nonmedical factors that contribute to such disparities,” he adds.

How do you know if you have high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is considered elevated when you have consistent systolic readings of 130 mm Hg or higher or diastolic readings of 80 mm Hg or higher, according to the [U.S. National Heart](#). High blood pressure is often referred to as the “silent killer” because it is largely symptomless. Therefore the best way to know if your blood pressure is elevated is to regularly check your numbers. You can even invest in an at-home blood pressure machine that will electronically send your readings to your doctor so that they can keep track of your blood pressure.

Although high blood pressure is largely symptomless, the following symptoms may be related to high blood pressure:

- **Blood spots in the eyes:** Blood spots in the eyes are more common in people with diabetes or high blood pressure, although neither condition causes blood spots.
- **Facial flushing:** Facial flushing occurs when blood vessels in the face dilate. Although high blood pressure is not the cause of facial flushing, many symptoms such as emotional stress, exposure to heat or hot water, alcohol consumption and exercise can temporarily raise your blood pressure.
- **Dizziness:** Dizziness should not be ignored, especially if the onset is sudden. Sudden dizziness, loss of balance or coordination and trouble walking are signs of a stroke. High blood pressure is the leading sign of a stroke.

Managing your blood pressure

Making the following changes will help keep your blood pressure under control:

- Eat a well-balanced diet that's low in salt
- Limit alcohol
- Enjoy regular physical activity
- Manage stress
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Quit smoking
- Take your medications properly
- Work together with your doctor

If you make those changes and stay consistent with a heart-healthy diet, you will be able to see the following results:

- Reduced high blood pressure.
- Prevented or delayed development of high blood pressure.
- Enhanced effectiveness of blood pressure medications.
- Lowered risk of heart attack, stroke, heart failure, kidney damage, vision loss and sexual dysfunction.

Managing high blood pressure is a lifelong commitment, but it is important to listen to your doctor and remember that you and your doctor are partners in this journey.

November 10, 2021 by Jason Henderson