Stress Can Kill: Hypertension In Black Americans

Chronically high levels of stress may increase Black Americans' risk of high blood pressure, a

new study suggests.

“Given the disproportionately high burden of hypertension in African-Americans, determining if chronic stress increases the risk of hypertension in this population is an important question that could guide prevention strategies,” said lead study author Tanya Spruill, an associate professor at NYU School of Medicine.

For the study, researchers analyzed data from more than 1,800 black participants in the Jackson Heart Study. They found that over seven years, those who reported long-term high stress levels were 22% more likely to develop high blood pressure than those with low stress levels.

High blood pressure can contribute to stroke, a leading cause of death and disability. The link between stress and blood pressure was independent of sociodemographic factors, traditional high blood pressure risk factors, and health behaviors.

The results were published on October 16, 2019, in the Journal of the American Heart Association.

“Over the study follow-up period, almost half of the participants developed hypertension,” Spruill said in a journal news release. *“This highlights the need for new hypertension prevention strategies for African-Americans. Lifestyle change is effective, however, it can be challenging to achieve.”*

Spruill said that culturally sensitive stress management interventions may help prevent high blood pressure and reduce subsequent heart risk among Black Americans. But more research is needed first.

“Because this is an observational study, we interpret the findings cautiously. However, our results suggest that evaluating chronic stress over time rather than at a single occasion can help identify those at greatest risk,” she said.

Blacks report higher overall stress levels than whites, the authors noted.

For more information on Black Americans and high blood pressure, visit The American Heart Association.

SOURCE: Journal of the American Heart Association, news release, Oct. 16, 2019