

Diet and Stroke

Summary of Significant Trends:

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in North Carolina for men and women who are black or white with 5,396 people dying of stroke in 2001.^{1,2} It is the fourth leading cause of death among Native Americans.¹ The decline in stroke deaths over the past 30 years has slowed during the last ten years. In fact, stroke death rates have remained nearly level, with little or no improvement since 1992. The coastal plains region of North Carolina has some of the highest stroke death rates in the entire nation. This region, along with areas in South Carolina and Georgia, has been called the “Buckle” of the Stroke Belt.²

Elevated blood pressure levels are a major cause of cardiovascular diseases including stroke.^{3,4} Even though a clear relationship has now been established between habitual sodium intake and blood pressure levels, the average American adult ingests nearly 4,000 mg of sodium daily, far exceeding the current recommendation to consume no more than 2400 mg per day.^{5,6}

In addition stroke is the leading cause of serious, long-term disability in the nation and likely in North Carolina as well.²

Emerging Trends and Issues:

The aging of North Carolina’s population is likely to increase the incidence of stroke in North Carolina and may further slow or reverse the decades-long downward trend in death rates. Being over age 65 is a risk factor for stroke. The prevalence of hypertension rises dramatically with increasing age; by age 80, more than 70% of the population is hypertensive. Blacks suffer from even higher rates of hypertension and its deleterious effects than whites.⁷ The majority of hypertension is uncontrolled however it is a largely preventable risk factor.^{8,9} The National High Blood Pressure Education guidelines recommend five nutritional/lifestyle approaches to prevent hypertension: (1) reduction of sodium intake, (2) weight reduction in the overweight, (3) regular physical activity, (4) moderation of alcohol intake, and (5) an eating plan that is rich in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products and reduced in saturated fat, total fat and cholesterol.

Relevance of Trends to County Programs

Although the task is daunting, the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service is prepared to educate and disseminate reliable, non-biased, research-based information to all North

Carolinians to lower their risk of stroke through diet and lifestyle change. Programs available include: Give Your Heart A Healthy Beat, Partners in Wellness, and Noonliting.

References

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Sources of Supporting Data:

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute;
www.nhlbi.nih.gov

Primary Contact: Jackie McClelland, Ph.D.
Jackie_mcclelland@ncsu.edu

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