Young Adults' Health Beliefs Clash With Behaviors

A recent survey found that eight in 10 people between the ages of 25-44 believe they're living healthy lifestyles, and are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors than 18-24 year-olds participating in the survey.

"This survey shows the dangerous disconnect that many young Americans have about how their behaviors affect their risks for stroke and other cardiovascular diseases," said Ralph Sacco, M.D., neurologist and president of the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association. "Starting healthy behaviors at a young age is critical to entering middle age in good shape. The investment you make in your health now will have a large payoff as you age. We want everyone – especially young people – to strive to avoid stroke, which can affect anyone at any age."

People who make healthy lifestyle choices lower their risk of having a first stroke by as much as 80 percent compared with those who don't make healthy choices, according to American Heart Association/American Stroke Association guidelines released in December. The healthy behaviors include eating a low-fat diet high in fruits and vegetables, drinking alcohol and sugar-sweetened beverages in moderation, exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy body weight and not smoking.

Most 18-24 year olds said they want to live long and maintain quality health throughout their life. On average, they want to live to age 98. Yet, one-third of those surveyed don't believe engaging in healthy behaviors now could affect their risk of stroke in the future and 18 percent could not identify at least one stroke risk factor. "Young adults need to make a connection between healthy behaviors and a healthy brain and healthy heart," Sacco said. "If we are not able to help young adults understand the relevance of their actions now and their risk of stroke tomorrow, then we could be looking at an increase in stroke diagnoses and deaths within the next 10 to 20 years."

Results from the survey also revealed that as people age, they become more aware of their overall health and risk factors for heart disease and stroke:

- Among 35-44 year olds, only 22 percent said they were not concerned about cardiovascular diseases and conditions, including heart disease/heart attack, high blood pressure, obesity, high cholesterol, diabetes and stroke.
- Yet, about half (48 percent) of them are more likely to have health concerns they struggle with today.
- Thirty-six percent of 25-34 year olds said they were not concerned about

cardiovascular diseases and conditions.
- Forty-three percent of 18-24 year olds were least concerned about cardiovascular disease.
- All groups said that they're least worried about stroke as a personal health threat
- Long life with quality health is also a goal of many 25-44 year olds. The average age this group wishes to reach is 91. If they continue to live healthfully, they will have a better chance of reaching that goal than those under 25.

In the United States, someone suffers a stroke every 40 seconds.

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