



Job stress raises blood pressure

White-collar workers should beware, say experts who have shown that chronic job stress can raise blood pressure.

High job demands, tight deadlines and low support in the workplace appeared to be triggers, particularly in men. The Canadian team at Laval University, Quebec, followed 6,719 workers over more than seven years. Studies are now underway to see if employers can alleviate the problem, they told the American Journal of Public Health.

Pressure

It is well established that work stress can lead to ill health, including heart attacks and depression, but studies looking at the effect of work stress on blood pressure have had mixed results.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is a major risk factor for a number of serious medical illnesses, including stroke and heart attacks.

If a person has hypertension, reducing blood pressure by 5mmHg can reduce their risk of having a heart attack by about 20%.

While stress is one cause of high blood pressure, there are a number of other things that can contribute, such as a poor diet, drinking too much alcohol, being overweight or obese, eating too much salt and not doing enough exercise.

Dr Chantal Guimont and colleagues who carried out the latest study acknowledge that other factors may have contributed to the high blood pressure found in the white-collar workers that they studied.

However, they believe job stress is important and may chronically activate the nervous and cardiovascular system. Dr Guimont said: "Our study supports the hypothesis that job strain, particularly in workers with low social support at work, may contribute to increased blood pressure."

Stress busting

She suggested that employers might be able to help by giving workers more support and control over deadlines and tasks.

Work-stress-related ill health is common. Data from Health and Safety Executive (HSE) shows each case of stress-related ill health leads to an average of 30.9 working days lost.

Chris Rowe, head of the HSE's stress programme, said: "There is good evidence that there are physical manifestations of stress.

"Most people work under an awful lot of pressure. It's managing it that is important. "Stress is the result of the feeling that people have when they are unable to deal with excessive pressure." He said there was a great deal that employers and staff could do to promote desirable working conditions.

June Davison, cardiac nurse at the British Heart Foundation, said: "For some people, being under constant stress at work can contribute to developing high blood pressure.

"Incorporating physical activity into your working day will help - use the stairs instead of the lift, get off the bus one stop early, or park the car away from the office, so that you walk some of the way to work."

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