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Potentially Deadly Syndrome Common in the United States

Written by Chuck Green | Published on May 19, 2015



Metabolic syndrome, the combination of health conditions that include obesity and high blood pressure, affects nearly half of Americans who are 60 years or older.



Metabolic syndrome is alive and well in the United States, especially among the nation's older adults.

Between 2011 and 2012, it's estimated that nearly 35 percent of all adults in the country and 50 percent of those at least 60 years of age or older had the syndrome.

This combination of health conditions, including obesity, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes, can contribute to cardiovascular illness and death.

The disease has jumped by age group, from 18 percent among those 20 to 39 years of age to 46 percent among those 60 years or older, according to Dr. Robert Wong, M.S., of the Alameda Health System-Highland Hospital in Oakland, California.

Wong was the chief author of the findings, [published today](#) in The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).


Wong said the trend is “a concerning observation,” given the aging U.S. population.

[Get the Facts: What Is Metabolic Syndrome? »](#)

Different Percentages in Different Ethnic

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Groups

The findings showed Hispanics with the highest percentage of the disease, followed by non-Hispanic whites and African Americans.

“This is actually a fascinating finding because it highlights race or ethnicity-specific disparities in disease prevalence and risk,” said Wong.

Understanding these differences among ethnic groups is important since it might yield clues to help better identify factors that contribute to those disparities, Wong said.

Furthermore, comprehending these disparities will help guide medical professionals to target high-risk populations and ethnicities for more aggressive disease management, added Wong.

While the rise in metabolic syndrome seems to have plateaued, the large proportion of U.S. adults affected still raises concerns, especially in light of the significant health consequences associated with the syndrome, said Wong.

In addition to cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome increases the risk of concurrent nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, which can contribute to an increased risk of liver cancer.

A number of studies, including the work completed by Wong's group, suggest that nonalcoholic fatty liver disease soon will become the leading cause of chronic liver disease in the United States.

[Get the Facts: What Is Fatty Liver Disease? »](#)

Looking at the Disease as a Whole

The findings are also important for pinpointing the proper diagnostic workup for the syndrome, Wong said.

While most clinicians routinely assess and manage individual components of metabolic syndrome, these components must be considered together, he said.

The study also found that from 2003-2004 to 2011-2012, the overall prevalence of the metabolic syndrome increased from 33 percent to almost 35 percent, likely mirroring the overall spike in obesity, Wong noted.

Based on 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 trends, the overall prevalence of the disease remained stable, according to the study, as did the prevalence trends among men and all race and ethnic groups.

Among women, the presence of the syndrome decreased slightly from 39

percent in 2007-2008 to 36 percent in 2011-2012.

While acknowledging that drop off, Wong asserted the primary message is “a huge proportion” of U.S. adults have the disease and we may soon see the negative health implications of this trend, which will manifest itself in cardiovascular diseases and nonalcoholic fatty liver disease.

Overall, the issue is complex because the risks and impact of metabolic syndrome is, among other things, influenced by genetic, lifestyle, and environmental factors.

“More research is needed to better define the true impact of the syndrome on disease risk [and] whether the syndrome affects individuals equally and if implementing lifestyle and medical therapies can completely reverse the disease risks associated with the syndrome’s prevalence,” Wong said.

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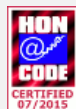
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