- Eating customs

More adults below 50 prone to stroke due to stress, unhealthy eating habits

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THE belief that stroke only happens among older adults may not be true anymore. While older people are more likely to suffer from a stroke, those below 50 years of age are fast catching up as the proportion continues to rise each year.

A study by the American Heart Association revealed that chances of suffering a stroke among young adults have risen by about 40 percent over the past few decades.

While there are factors and conditions like injuries, blood clotting, infections, heart defects, including auto- immune conditions, that can cause a stroke, more common problems, essentially those that happen among older people like high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes, can also have a devastating impact on the health of young adults.

Stroke risk factors

MANY people may have probably grown tired of constantly hearing about the various types of strokes, whether temporary ischemic strokes or what is called "mini strokes," or the intracerebral hemorrhage (ICH) strokes, which happens when a blood vessel bursts and causes bleeding in the brain. The latter, as bared by a 2022 study in the US, is happening more frequently among young patients.

But medical professionals are one in saying that many of the other stroke risk factors are based on one's lifestyle and are more controllable, such as hypertension, and even diabetes, cholesterol, and obesity, all of which are largely manageable through appropriate medical care.

Aside from these more known risk factors, other factors are fast emerging such as stress and daily diet, particularly those high in sugar, fat, and salt.

The increasing prevalence of strokes among young people is a concerning trend that has been observed worldwide. Doctors suggest avoiding the consumption of processed foods, those high in salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats, as they contribute to obesity, high cholesterol, and hypertension. Medical professionals encourage more mobility, even if for a few minutes daily in order to avoid a sedentary lifestyle and development of cardiovascular conditions. Given that more people are inclined to consume alcohol, smoke, or even use recreational drugs because of their present lifestyle, they are more likely candidates to suffer from stroke.

Many of today's younger adults are also prone to stress and other mental health issues such as anxiety and depression which in turn may contribute to elevate blood pressure. Seeking professional help is recommended on how to properly cope with stress in order to avoid health- related ramifications.

BE FAST

THE Stroke Society of the Philippines (SSP) continues to push for more awareness and information on how to spot symptoms of a stroke by applying the "BE FAST" approach.

"B" is about Balance, which involves finding out if the person has difficulty in walking and seems out of balance, lacks coordination and is likely to fall; "E" or the Eyes, like finding out if there are noticeable changes in one or both eyes like loss of or blurry vision; "F" is for the face, if is is somewhat drooping and the person has difficulty smiling. Best test is to ask the person to smile and compare both sides of the face; "A" or Arm Weakness. Does the arm feel weak or numb, especially on one side of the body? The person may be asked to lift the affected arm to see if there is weakness; "S" or Speech, like problems, difficulties, or changes when speaking or understanding words. The person may be asked to speak to check if there are problems in speaking; and finally, "T" or Time to Call and ask for help and bring the patient to the nearest hospital once the symptoms are present.

In a paper called "Current State of Stroke Care in the Philippines" published in the National Library of Medicine, the world's largest biomedical library, it noted a low awareness about stroke in several regions in the country, while noting that "patient awareness must also be improved as it is crucial in ensuring an efficient stroke care system."

It also cited the SSP Guidelines for the Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation of Stroke, where it said a community survey reported that "only 34.4 percent were knowledgeable on stroke, and respondents even misconstrued the disease as a heart attack."

The paper stated that community education through a range of health promotion strategies on primary and secondary stroke prevention "are crucial information in ensuring the prevention and management of stroke."

Aside from that, it emphasized that "knowledge of the signs and symptoms and potential initial response can be lifesaving to patients…and can decrease the time gap before taking action and result in the timely patient presentation to the available healthcare facilities for treatment or management."