

[IMAGE]

Hypertension: Highly Likely

Do you think you're safe from high blood pressure? Think again. A study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* shows that 90% of Americans may develop hypertension (high blood pressure) in their lives. This health condition potentially leads to heart disease and premature death.

The authors of the study determined lifetime risk for hypertension in 1,300 people aged 55-65 years and hypertension-free at the start of the study. Hypertension was defined as a blood pressure of at least 140/90 mm Hg (millimeters of mercury - the standard measure of blood pressure), or the use of antihypertensive medication.

Lifetime risk for the development of hypertension was 90% in both age groups. In other words, nine out of 10 people in the 22-year study had high blood pressure at some point later in life. Also, 60% of the individuals took antihypertensive medication at some point.

Besides detrimental effects on health, hypertension creates a financial burden on society, which will likely increase as the percentage of older Americans increases in the near future. The best ways to prevent high blood pressure are essentially free: Exercise regularly (30 minutes of aerobic exercise, five times per week is ideal) and maintain a diet high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and low in fats, simple sugars, and sodium.

Reference:

Vasan RS, Beiser A, Seshadri S, et al. Residual lifetime risk for developing hypertension in middle-aged women and men: The Framingham Heart Study. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 2002;287(8), pp. 1003-1010.

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