

Food insecurity increases kids' risk for high blood pressure



Food insecurity – i.e., poor access to nutritional foods – is an under-recognised contributor to health disparities. New research indicates that kids who were food insecure were more likely to have high blood pressure than kids with secure access to food. The findings were presented at the American Heart Association's Joint Hypertension 2018 Scientific Sessions.

According to researchers, food insecurity affects about 40 million Americans, including 6 million children and adolescents. Food insecurity can lead to poor diet quality, including increased salt intake, which is known to increase the risk of developing high blood pressure.

In adults, it's well established that food insecurity is tied to socioeconomic status and has many health consequences, but in children it's less defined, said Andrew Michael South, MD, assistant professor of paediatric nephrology at Wake Forest School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and one of the study's authors.

South and colleagues studied available information on food insecurity and blood pressure from 2007 to 2014 in 7,215 children, ages 8 to 17 years, in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. They identified children 13 years and older with high blood pressure if they had a systolic reading of 120 mmHg or higher or diastolic blood pressure of 80 mmHg or higher. For children younger than 13, high blood pressure was defined as systolic or diastolic blood pressure at or above the 90th percentile of what is normal for a child's age, sex and height, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics' hypertension guideline released last year.

The research team found:

- More than one-fifth, or 1,460 of the 7,125 children, were food insecure.
- More than 12 percent of all the children had high blood pressure.
- Among food insecure children, 14.4 percent had high blood pressure, compared to 11.6 percent of food secure children.

After adjusting for other factors, such as obesity, the researchers found that food insecurity still increased the odds that a child would have high blood pressure.

"High blood pressure – even in childhood – matters," Dr. South said. "As a kid, if you have high blood pressure, you're at much higher risk of having high blood pressure as an adult – as young as in your 20's or early 30's. And hypertension sets the stage for other bad health problems because it impacts the heart and kidneys."

He notes that future research looking at interventions to increase access to more nutritious foods could have important implications on population health. "In order to show a causative relationship, a longitudinal study following children over time would be next," the author adds.

Source: [American Heart Association](#)

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Published on : Fri, 7 Sep 2018