



Introduction

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a group of diseases involving the circulatory system and includes strokes and diseases of the heart. CVD is the leading cause of death in New York State, claiming over 70,000 lives each year. It accounts for 45% of all deaths statewide. Despite the high death rates, more people are living with CVD than ever before. This is partly explained by improvements in medicine and by New York's aging population. Because CVD can be avoided and successfully treated, it is important to educate people about risk factors and lifestyle changes to reduce their risk. Once identified, many risk factors for CVD can be altered to prevent its onset. Even after a heart attack or stroke, steps can be taken to lower the risk of another event. For example, people who are physically inactive, have high blood pressure, or have high fat diets are all known to be at risk for CVD. Prevention programs that target such people include promoting reduced consumption of saturated fats, increased physical activity and smoking prevention.¹ People can also benefit from physician counseling and the use of various medications as administered under a clinician's care.^{2,3,4} *This report provides information on CVD among New York adults and the extent to which exercise, healthful diet and the use of aspirin are employed to prevent cardiovascular disease.*

Contents

Cardiovascular Disease and Prevention in New York State

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Methods

The data on CVD diagnosis and related prevention activities in New York State were collected in the 1999 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey. Questions were included to estimate the prevalence of heart disease, angina and stroke in the population, and to assess some of the practices aimed at lowering the risk of developing CVD (see questions in Table 1).

Table 1
Selected BRFSS Questions

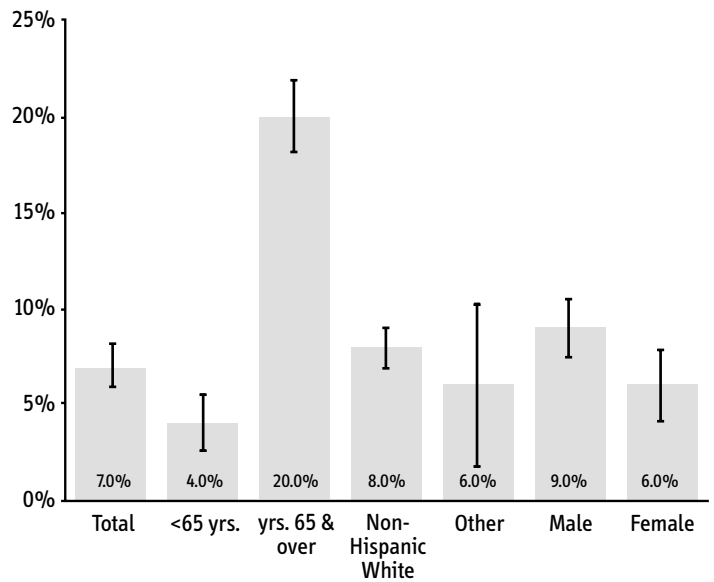
1. To lower your risk of developing heart disease or stroke, has a doctor advised you to...
a) Eat fewer high fat or high cholesterol foods
b) Exercise more
2. To lower your risk of developing heart disease or stroke, are you...
a) Eating fewer high fat or high cholesterol foods
b) Exercising more
3. Has a doctor ever told you that you had any of the following?
a) Heart attack or myocardial infarction
b) Angina or coronary heart disease
c) Stroke
4. [If the respondent is aged 35 or over and takes aspirin]
Do you take aspirin daily or every other day? Why do you take aspirin?
a) To reduce the chance of a heart attack
b) To reduce the chance of a stroke

Results

Self-Reported Heart Attack, Angina, and Stroke

Because the sample was not large enough to provide prevalence estimates for heart attack, angina and stroke separately, results based on combining these three different conditions are reported. Approximately 7% of New York adults reported having been told by a doctor that they have had a heart attack, angina, or stroke (Figure 1). As would be expected, the proportion of individuals reporting some form of CVD was higher among those aged 65 years and older. Men reported CVD only slightly more often than women. Differences by race were small.

Figure 1
Respondents told by a doctor they had a heart attack, angina, or stroke



Diet and Physical Activity to Lower the Risk of Heart Attack and Stroke: Doctor's Advice

Half of New York adults reported receiving advice about exercise from their doctor and 37% reported receiving dietary advice (Figure 2). With the exception of those aged 65 years and older, exercise advice was given more frequently than dietary advice in all groups. Respondents were more likely to report receiving advice about diet if they were aged 65 and older. Exercise advice was given less frequently to non-Hispanic whites compared to others and to males compared to females.

New York adults, who received advice about diet and exercise, were more likely to practice these behaviors. Eighty-one percent of New York adults who were advised to eat fewer high fat/cholesterol foods reported doing so (Figure 3). Seventy-five percent of New York adults reporting they received advice to exercise to lower their risk claimed to be following this advice. There were little differences found by age, race, and gender for the rate at which advice is followed. The one exception was that adults aged 65 and over were more likely to follow dietary advice (90%, compared to 78% for those under the age of 65).

Figure 2
Doctor's advice to change diet or exercise more

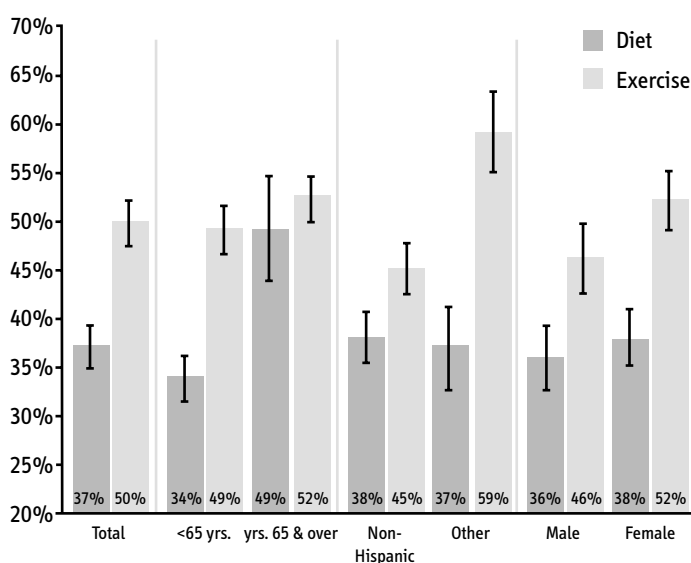
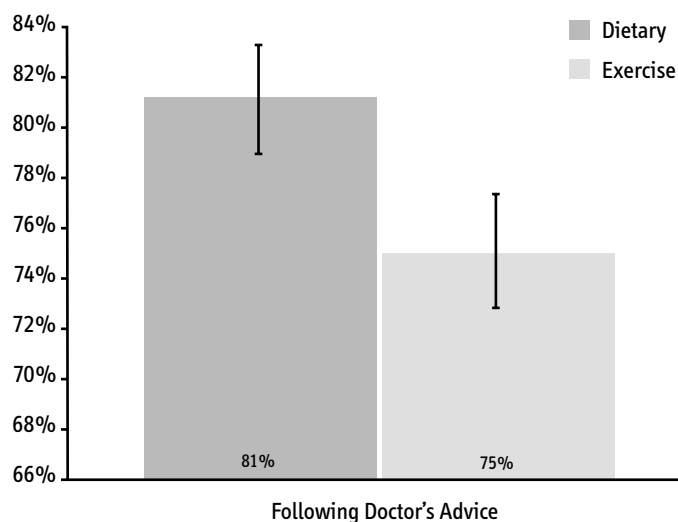


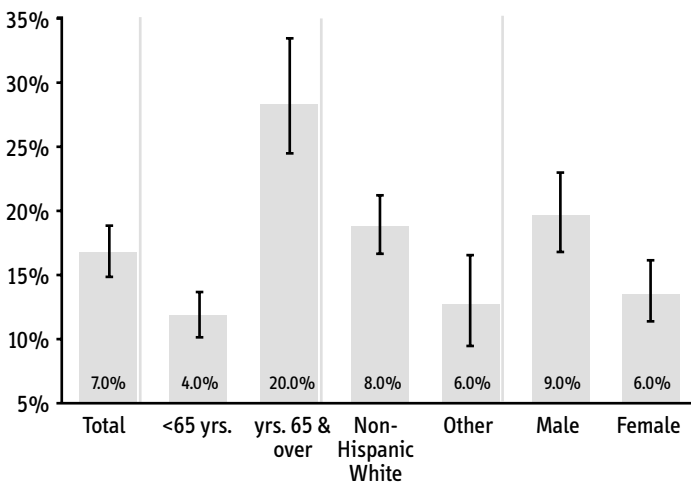
Figure 3
Respondents following doctor's advice to change diet or exercise more



Aspirin Use to Reduce CVD risk

Approximately 17% of New York State adults aged 35 and over used aspirin to reduce their risk of either heart disease or stroke (figure 4). Use of aspirin among those aged 65 and over was more than twice that reported by those under the age of 65. Non-Hispanic whites and males were also more likely to use aspirin than others, but the difference is not as large as it is for age groups.

Figure 4
Respondents who take aspirin to reduce risk of CVD



Discussion

This report demonstrates that those getting a doctor's advice to change diet or increase exercise are very likely to follow the advice. The findings suggest that advice from a doctor can be a significant motivator for individuals in reducing their risk of cardiovascular disease. Yet only half of those surveyed reported that their physician had provided advice on physical activity, and even less reported receiving advice on diet. Because of the large numbers of New York adults suffering from CVD and the evidence indicating that prevention activities can be very effective in treating these conditions, the New York Department of Health has made secondary prevention of CVD a priority area. The Healthy Heart Program (HHP) of the New York State Department of Health is dedicated to reducing the risks of CVD for all New York State residents, in part through improving the CVD prevention efforts of health care professionals. The HHP provides professional education opportunities for clinicians in both primary and secondary CVD prevention. These opportunities include: professional conferences, regional workgroups collaborating on prevention projects, hospital-based colloquia, and technical assistance and support to managed care organizations and medical practices. These efforts incorporate many of the factors outlined in this report, especially the need for physicians and other health care professionals to include advice on healthful eating and physical activity during routine medical care and following a cardiovascular event.

References

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- 3 Smith SC Jr, Blair SN, Criqui MH, Fletcher GF, Fuster V, Gersh BJ, Gotto AM, Gould KL, Greenland P, Grundy SM, Hill MN, Hlatky MA, Houston-Miller N, Krauss RM, LaRosa J, Ockene IS, Oparil S, Pearson TA, Rappaport E, Starke RD, and the Secondary Prevention Panel. Preventing heart attack and death in patients with coronary disease. *Circulation*. 1995;92:2-4.
- 4 Hennekens CH, Dyken ML, Fuster V. Aspirin as a therapeutic agent in cardiovascular disease: a statement for health care professionals from the American Heart Association. *Circulation* 1997;96:2751–3.