

Troubling News from the Medical Community

By Thomas B. Gilliam, Ph.D.

Last week, a number of research/letter publications occurred in a variety of electronic research journals from the American Medical Association. These publications focused on trends in obesity, hypertension, daily-step-count and Covid-19. All toll, there were six independent publications, and they were all related and seemed to have focused on a similar message/theme.

Obesity: The percent increase in the number of obese individuals increased in children and adolescents by about 4 percentage points from 1999-2000 to 2017-2018. In adult men, the increase was about 15 percentage points to 43% and for women the increase was about 9 percentage points to 42% for the same time period. The troubling news in the percent increase for severe obesity (using a BMI of 40 as the cut-off for severe) for adult men increased from 5.3% to 7.6% and for women increased from 6.2% to 11.5%.

Hypertension: High blood pressure is still one the top 5 diseases in the country and leads to increased risk for cardiovascular disease, stroke, kidney disease and vascular dementia. The troubling news with hypertension is the number of patients with controlled blood pressure via prescriptions, diet/exercise has decreased from 53.8% to 43.7% in the time from of 2014 to 2018. Obesity contributes to high blood pressure.

Covid-19: The research is clear that those with obesity and hypertension have a greater probability of death from Covid-19. This is not only true for older individuals (>64 years of age) but it is also true for those **hospitalized** between the ages of 18-34 years.

Step-Count: The difference in mortality was nearly 5 times greater for those taking 4,000 steps or less per day versus those taking closer to 12,000 steps. Of interest, two key points: walk at least 8,000 steps daily to reduce your risk for mortality and 2) the number of steps is more important than pace of walking.

Common Theme: Sadly, with hypertension and obesity across all age levels getting worse in addition to related diseases like diabetes, death for those with high blood pressure and obesity and **hospitalized** with Covid continues to be high. All of the researchers/authors made a point to talk about how hypertension, obesity and to a certain extent Covid-19 can be prevented through healthy lifestyle choices related to diet and exercise especially for adolescents and young adults. In earlier papers I've published, I have discussed how strengthening muscle can also enhance the body's immune system. This offers greater protection against infections and viruses like Covid-19. At the same time, strengthening muscle burns calories which will help manage body weight (obesity) and high blood pressure.

1. Ogden CL, et.al. Trends in Obesity Prevalence by Race and Hispanic Origin – 1999-2000 to 2017-2018. JAMA. 2020; Aug 28: E1-E3.
2. Rodgers GP, Gibbons GH. Obesity and Hypertension in the Time of Covid-19 - Editorial. JAMA. 2020; Sep 9: E1-E3.

3. Muntner P, et.al. Trends in Blood Pressure Control Among US Adults with Hypertension, 1999-2000 to 2017-2018. JAMA. 2020; Sep 9: E1-E11.
4. Cunningham JW, et.al. Clinical Outcomes in Young US Adults Hospitalized with Covid-19. JAMA Internal Medicine. 2020; Sep 9: E1-E2.
5. Curfman G, et.al. Treatment and Control of Hypertension in 2020 – Editorial. JAMA. 2020; Sep 9: E1-E2.
6. Saint-Maurice PF, et.al. Association of Daily Step Count and Step Intensity With Mortality Among US Adults. JAMA. 2020;323(12):1151-1160.