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Stroke Chances Rise As Work Hours Increase

*By Ana-Marija Dolaskie — October 13, 2015*

The next time you plan on working overtime, you might want to think again. According to a recent study, working later hours could be associated with an increased risk of stroke.

The analysis [1], published in *The Lancet,* included 25 cohort studies, totaling more than 600,000 men and women with no history of cardiovascular issues, and another roughly 528,000 men and women with no history of stroke. The participants were followed for 8.5 and 7.2 years, respectively.

The researchers found that working 55 hours per week or longer was associated with a 33 percent increased risk of stroke, and a 13 percent increased risk of cardiovascular issues like coronary heart disease.

However, those working fewer than 55 hours per week aren't in the clear, either. Those punching in between 41 and 48 hours per week had a 10 percent increased risk of stroke, and a 27 percent risk of stroke for those individuals working between 49 to 54 hours per week.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average full-time worker in 2014 worked 42.5 hours. Ten percent of nonagricultural workers worked between 49 and 59 hours per week, and 20.7 percent of agricultural workers worked more than 60 hours per week, according to *JAMA* [2].

The study suggests that repetitive stress response exposure and lack of sleep can lead to increased blood pressure, as well as behavioral changes like inactivity or alcohol consumption. Those working long hours may also ignore serious health symptoms or put off medical care.

Researchers point out that the link is observational, not causal.

The numbers suggest a serious trend, but unless all of us consider a part-time gig, what's the solution?

In Europe, workers' rights designate that their hours be capped at 48 hours per week. In Japan, legislation has passed with the aim of reducing "death by overwork." By contrast, in the U.S. no measures have been enacted.

Currently, there is not a specific OSHA standard for extended or unusual work shifts," wrote [2]
Occupational Safety and Health Administration spokesperson Kimberly Darby, in an email to JAMA, "and there are no plans to propose one at this time. We continue to follow the issue closely.

It seems mitigating the workload lies heavily on the individual and luckily technology is on our side. The latest office health trends include standing desks or offering employees worksite wellness programs, like an on-site gym, or multiple work breaks.

Some employers use wellness programs to address long-term employee health, productivity and health care costs. Some offices even practice "summer Fridays" where it's OK to sneak out shortly after lunch and enjoy a longer weekend, as a way to improve mental health as well.

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