

National Post

"Silent" strokes may occur in early middle age

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Silent cerebral infarctions (strokes) -- brain damage detected on magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in the absence of stroke symptoms - may be present in early middle age and are associated with many of the same risk factors as strokes that do cause symptoms, according to findings from a study released Thursday.

The findings reinforce the importance of prevention, early detection and treatment of cardiovascular risk factors in mid-life, the study group maintains. "This is especially true because silent cerebral infarction has been associated with an increased risk of incident stroke and cognitive impairment."

Dr. Sudha Seshadri, at Boston University School of Medicine, and associates determined the prevalence of silent brain infarctions in 2040 people whose average age was 62 years and who were free of stroke and cognitive impairment when they had an MRI of the brain between 1998 and 2001.

The overall prevalence of silent brain infarction was roughly 11 percent, increasing from about 7 percent in subjects aged 30 to 49 years to more than 15 percent in subjects aged 70 to 89 years.

These silent strokes were significantly associated with the presence of cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure, as well as the presence of a heart arrhythmia called atrial fibrillation and with thick neck arteries, and partially blocked neck arteries.

SOURCE: Stroke, online June 26, 2008