

# Men face danger of dying young: study

## Fears cardiovascular disease nearing epidemic

By Ewa Kretowicz

Australian men are facing an epidemic of cardiovascular disease and are in danger of dying younger than their parents, according to the head researcher of the biggest blood pressure study ever undertaken.

The blood pressure data of more than 500,000 Australians was analysed by researchers from the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute.

Head of preventative health Professor Simon Stewart said 15 per cent of men aged 18 to 34 had hypertension, which was three times higher than women in the same age group.

"Given that high blood pressure is the greatest risk factor for cardiovascular disease, it is concerning to think about what impact this trend may have in 10 or 20 years time," Professor Stewart said.

The history of more than 90,000 Australians under the age of 35 was reviewed as part of the study.

"This is the largest study of blood pressures in primary care and we found a really alarmingly high differ-

ential between the number of men and women who were affected by high blood pressure," he said.

The public health researcher said if the trend continued, young Australian men could die earlier than their grandparents and parents.

"The future heart health prospects for men aged 18 to 34 isn't assured because the longer you run around with high blood pressure the more likely you'll have a heart attack and stroke and the more likely you'll die young."

Cardiovascular disease is the biggest killer of Australians, with two out of three men and one out of three women having a stroke or heart attack in their lifetime.

The study found one in seven young men had a blood pressure reading above 140/90mmHg, a level the National Heart Foundation deems high enough to warrant treatment.

Professor Stewart urged young men to get active and see their GP or pharmacist for a check-up.

"Medication is the last resort. They need to start establishing good

healthy lifestyles to lower their blood pressure to get their levels right and to lower their weight before they enter middle age – that high-risk period," he said.

"We are facing a new epidemic of cardiovascular disease unless we change something radically and that means becoming a fit young nation again."

He said as the population demographic changed there should be a natural decline in cardiovascular disease.

"But the best-case scenario at the moment [is] we'll see sustained levels and it might even get worse."

The full *Pressure Points* study will be completed in 2012 and will also measure the success of prevention campaigns.

According to the National Health and Medical Research Council, 3.7 million Australians are estimated to have cardiovascular problems.

The Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute is Australia's largest independent non-for-profit researcher of heart health. The study was funded by a pharmaceutical company.