

Young men risk heart attack

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ONE in seven Australian men aged 18-34 have high blood pressure, putting them at risk of heart attack or stroke, research has found.

Researchers made the finding after analysing the medical records of 90,000 Australians in that age group — 36 per cent of them men — over the past five years.

Researcher Simon Stewart, of the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, said 15 per cent of men had a blood pressure reading above 140 over 90, which was a level at which doctors considered prescribing medication.

In comparison about 5 per cent of women aged 18-34 had high blood pressure, which was thought to be due to protective effects of oestrogen.

Professor Stewart described the rate of high blood pressure in young men as alarming and

said career pressures could be to blame.

“We are definitely seeing in Australia people are working longer and harder, so work stresses are a potential factor.

“It means that you’ve got young men walking around with high blood pressure who are a time bomb for future heart attacks and strokes.

“In this age group it’s rare to have a heart attack or stroke but when they do happen, nine out of 10 times it’s immediately fatal.”

Professor Stewart said young men who had not taken action to reduce their high blood pressure were likely to reach middle age with a heightened risk.

“Many young men may well be on track for a debilitating or even fatal heart attack or stroke in their 50s or 60s.

“You’ve had that pressure in the system so you’re more sus-

ceptible to bleeding in the brain, damaging your kidney and growing plaques in your heart.

“All of these factors with age create a perfect storm — particularly if you’re overweight, still eating badly and not exercising.”

Professor Stewart said young men could protect themselves by having their blood pressure monitored, exercising regularly and eating well.

“There is a magic pill for all of the ills of heart health — and that is a healthy lifestyle,” he said.

The findings are part of a larger study, funded by the drug company Boehringer Ingelheim, which will analyse the blood pressure levels of half a million Australians.

Cardiovascular disease caused the death of almost 50,000 Australians — or one in three deaths — in 2008.