

EXPLORING THE FRENCH PARADOX

Unravelling the role of sex in hypertension management

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In the enchanting ambiance of a wintery Paris, amidst the twinkling lights of Christmas, the French Society of Hypertension hosted a captivating session at their 2023 meeting where experts delved into the intricacies of lifestyle modification*. Amidst the scholarly discourse, a curious revelation surfaced, echoing the sentiments of Professor Pierre Fesler from the audience – the oft-overlooked factor of sexual health.

A recent study by Lou et al.,¹ which traversed the dominions of sexual activity and hypertension, has shed some light on a previously understudied aspect of cardio-sexual health. The study postulated a provocative hypothesis: could decreased sexual frequency be an early harbinger of all-cause mortality in young and middle-aged hypertensive patients?

Drawing upon data gleaned from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), the study cast a meticulous gaze upon the association between sexual frequency and mortality risk among hypertensive individuals aged 20 to 59 years in the United States. With a formidable sample size of 4565 participants, the study wielded robust statistical power, illuminating a significant nexus between lower sexual frequency and heightened all-cause mortality risk, particularly within the realm of marital status.

While the study posits plausible explanations for this association – ranging from underlying health status to the cardiovascular benefits akin to exercise and the psychosocial dynamics of intimate relationships – it beckons further exploration into the intricate interplay of these mechanisms.

Acknowledging the study's limitations, including its observational nature and potential biases, it underscores the imperative of holistic approaches to hypertension management.

Moreover, the discussion extended beyond mortality risks, delving into the nuanced complexities intertwined with hypertension and sexual health. From the well-known effects of certain antihypertensive medications on sexual function to the reciprocal influence of erectile dysfunction medication on blood pressure, the symbiotic relationship between hypertension and sexual health beckons closer scrutiny.

In conclusion, as we contemplate the update of lifestyle modification guidelines, perhaps it is time to embrace the quintessential French ethos – a harmonious blend of culinary indulgence, spirited exercise, and unabashed celebration of intimacy. For in unravelling the enigma of the French Paradox, we may find valuable insights into nurturing cardiovascular health and embracing life's pleasures with renewed vigour.

Reference:

1. Chuanjin Luo, Shuzhi Xu, Shiqin Bao, Bo Zhang, Xiaofen Zhong, Zhihua Huang, Ping Li, Jiahua Liang, Association between sexual frequency and all-cause mortality in young and middle-aged patients with hypertension: a cohort study of patient data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 2005-2014, *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, Volume

* Other speakers in the session were Professor Maciej Tomaszewski on diet, and Dr Sebastien Rubin on the fascinating topic of the French paradox - the observation that despite a diet relatively high in saturated fats, the French population has a relatively low incidence of coronary heart disease (CHD) compared to other Western countries. Professor Marilucy Lopez-Sublet finished the session about implementing lifestyle recommendations into practice in France.

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