

TYPE A PERSONALITIES ARE PRONE TO HYPERTENSION AND CORONARY HEART DISEASE

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SUMMARY

In recent years, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the psychological study of patients with cardiovascular diseases and search for its relationship with hypertension and coronary artery disease is pursued. We tried to establish a relationship between the above factors with the help of a questionnaire. Thirty hypertensive patients were randomly selected and scored according to their response to the questionnaire; 80% were found to have type A behaviour and of these 60% were females. It is concluded that type A behaviour predisposes to hypertension and the incidence is more among females.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the circulatory system is the most sensitive of all to emotional stress. Under stressful conditions the vessels of the visceral organs constrict, and the heart works harder. As it beats faster and with greater force, the pulse quickens and blood pressure mounts.¹ Usually when the stress passes, the body resumes normal functioning and blood pressure returns to normal. However, under sustained exposure to emotional stress, high blood pressure may persist. While organic factors contribute to high blood pressure, emotional stress plays a key role.

Many people are unaware of high blood pressure and can remain so for many years and may develop organ damage. Fortunately hypertension is both simple to detect and relatively easy to control, by adopting measures, like changes in life style and drugs.^{3,4} Type A and type B are two specific behaviour patterns associated with increased and decreased likelihood of developing hypertension and other heart problems respectively. Type A behaviour

has three main characteristics. (a) Striving to achieve poorly defined and forever expanding goals. (b) Struggling to accomplish goals in limited time. (c) Competing against others and with oneself. They measure their own performance by rigorous standards and thus keep themselves under unremitting pressure, finding it difficult to relax. Eventually the pressure that builds up, takes it toll on their cardiovascular system. Type B personalities are quite opposite, they are easy going, noncompetitive, relaxed and tolerant.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Thirty hypertensive patients were randomly selected from the hospitals. They were between 25–45 years of age. Type A versus type B personality tests were administered to them. This personality test is a questionnaire, consisting of 15 items, with any of the five alternatives to select. "Very true of me" carrying 5 marks, "usually true of me" 4 marks, "sometimes true of me" 3, "seldom true of me" 2 and "never true of me" 1 mark (Table-1). According to the score obtained type A and type B personalities were analysed.

TABLE-1
QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions can help you to determine whether you are more like a Type A or a Type B personality. Answer each question by writing a number from the following list in the space provided next to each question:

1. I often try to do several things at the same time.	5	4	3	2	1
2. I often interrupt people when they are talking or try to hurry them by finishing their sentences for them.	5	4	3	2	1
3. I find it irritating when someone does a job slowly or inefficiently.	5	4	2	3	1
4. While people talk to me, I often think of something else (such as solving a problem) while I listen to them.	5	4	3	2	1
5. I usually become uncomfortable when I don't have anything to do.	5	4	3	2	1
6. I get frustrated when people take a long time getting to the point they are trying to make.	5	4	3	2	1
7. I tend to do most things quickly (walking, eating, speaking).	5	4	3	2	1
8. I get impatient when things move slowly (traffic jam, long lines).	5	4	3	2	1
9. I find it hard just to relax and do nothing.	5	4	3	2	1
10. I usually set deadlines and schedule for myself.	5	4	3	2	1
11. When I play games (cards, board games), it is more important for me to win than to have fun.	5	4	3	2	1
12. When I am emphasizing a point, I become tense and tend to raise my voice.	5	4	3	2	1
13. I prefer that people around me do things as quickly and efficiently as possible.	5	4	3	2	1
14. I accentuate key words when I speak.	5	4	3	2	1
15. I am a hard-driving and competitive person who values achievement and success.	5	4	3	2	1

RESULTS

As shown in Table-2 and 3, thirty hypertensive patients were taken as subjects. Out of these, 80% were diagnosed as type A and 20% as type B personalities. Among type A personalities, 25% were males and 75% females, where as among the type B personalities, 50% were males and 50% were females.

DISCUSSION

Stress is a fact of life at all ages. Stress can arise from a real threat or from a perceived one, without actual stressor. The five common sources of stress are frustration, conflict, pressures of society, major

change or transition in life style and self-imposed stress.⁵ Beyond a point the stress becomes distress. What acts to produce distress from stress, varies greatly from person to person.

The most serious psychophysiological disorder, i.e. hypertension causes heart attack, strokes and kidney failure. Some of people prone to hypertension are inhibited in their expression of aggressive and self demeaning.⁶

During recent years, a connection between cardiac problems and personality types has emerged. Two specific behavioural patterns are associated with increased and decreased likelihood of coronary artery

disease.⁷ These behavioural patterns are good indexes of predicting heart diseases. The two different lifestyles that appear to influence the severities of stress are style type A, which is characteristic of an individual who is rushed and hurried, with quick and abrupt speech. They are competitive even in noncompetitive situations, impatient and anxious. In other words they measure their own performance by rigorous standards and thus keep themselves under unremitting pressure and finds it difficult to relax. The pressure which builds up eventually takes its toll on their cardiovascular system.⁸ Type A persons are hard working and competitive, they seek recognition and advancement, which makes them take multiple activities with deadlines to meet. Most of the time, they function as alert, competent, efficient persons who get things done. All this makes them live under constant pressure. Thus they are likely to become hostile, impatient, anxious and disorganized under stressful conditions.¹¹ Studies conducted in the west revealed that two components of the type A pattern, impatience and competitiveness are particularly associated with heart diseases.⁹ Type B persons are quite opposite. They are easy going, noncompetitive, placid, relaxed and tolerant.

In our society, females are more vulnerable to pressures of society, broken homes, marital discord and disharmony with in-laws. Due to these problems, females are subjected to a lot of tension. To deal with failure or loss becomes difficult. This leads to acute depression and stress,

TABLE-2
PERCENTAGE OF TYPE A AND
TYPE B PERSONALITIES
(N=30)

Type-A	Type-B
80%	20%
(24)	(6)

TABLE-3
PERCENTAGE OF MALES AND
FEMALES AS TYPE A AND TYPE B
PERSONALITIES
(N = 30)

Personalities	Type A	Type B
Male	25% (6)	50% (3)
Female	75% (18)	50% (3)
Total	24	6

which in turn leads to various psychosomatic disorders, hypertension being one of them.¹⁰

Different studies show a close relationship between the reaction to stress and the increased adrenergic drive expressed by increased production of catecholamines.¹² If continuously activated, this emergency response causes a constantly higher than normal level of hormone production, which will eventually cause physical wear and tear of the body. A person in this continuously aroused state is then more likely to develop hypertension, headaches, ulcer and heart diseases.

CONCLUSION

Stress is a potent cause of heart problems. People carrying type A personality are more at risk. Change in life style becomes important and essential to avoid and cope with stressful conditions.

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