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## **Men in their 40s prime candidates for stress overload – Japantoday.com**

Takeshi Kondo (not his real name) was 47, successful, healthy (more or less) and optimistic about the future. This was in 2005. One hot summer morning that year, he woke up with a mysterious numbness in his left side. He could have dismissed it as nothing at all. If he had, he probably wouldn't have lived to tell the tale. Luckily he took it seriously and went straight to a hospital, where an MRI scan found a brain hemorrhage.

Plenty of men in their 40s are in wretched shape. They smoke too much, drink too much, eat too much, work too hard, exercise not at all. When the monthly Takarajima (October) says that 100,000 Japanese a year die suddenly and that men in their 40s are especially vulnerable, this is the sort of thing you expect to follow by way of explanation. But no. Kondo was fit and trim. That's not unusual. Physical debility is not the point. Stress is. It's a killer.

The health ministry defines sudden death as death within 24 hours of the first symptoms. Sometimes it occurs within one hour – sometimes within seconds. You don't get much warning.

In almost all cases, Takarajima says, the immediate cause is the brain or heart.

Kondo worked in sales, a notoriously stressful field, but what field isn't stressful in these mercilessly competitive times? He spent a week in hospital and two weeks convalescing at home. He's fine now, but still taking medicine every morning to keep his blood pressure down. And he never misses a daily round of light exercise.

Stress breaks down into two broad categories: acute and chronic, the former due to a particular and transient circumstance, the latter due to the state of the world in general. It's not always, of course, work-related. Lovers, family, friends, solitude, bills to pay, fear of earthquakes, fear of nuclear meltdowns and so on can all weigh on you and work their silent pathological havoc. Stress attacks the body at its weakest points, Takarajima explains. If you have a weak stomach,

your stomach will give out. If your blood pressure is high, it'll get higher; if low, lower. A weak heart will get weaker. Hardening arteries will harden faster.

Men in their 40s are in their working prime. With children to educate and, in many cases, aged parents to care for, there seems little they can do to reduce stress, short of forsaking all obligations and dropping out of society altogether. What, realistically speaking, can one do to guard against sudden death?

Takarajima offers a “self-check” list – 33 warning signs to watch for. If you suffer from any two or more, a trip to the hospital is in order. The warning signs include sudden headaches, sudden nausea, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, lack of exercise and insomnia.

Men in their 40s are Japan's leading demographic for suicide too, says Takarajima. But that's another story.

### **Questions:**

1. Do you agree that men in their 40s are prime candidates for stress overload? Why? Why not?
2. What other age groups do you think are at risk from stress? Why?
3. The article mentions 33 warning signs, but lists only 6. What do you think some of the others are?
4. Do you think life is generally more stressful now than 10 years ago? 20years ago? 30 years ago?
5. Do you feel like you have too much stress in your life now? Why? Why not?
6. So far, what was the most stressful age in your life? Why was it stressful?
7. Do you think Japan is a particularly stressful country? Why? Why not?
8. What tips can you give each other to avoid stress?

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