

Hispanics with clogged arteries at greatest risk of stroke, heart attack

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Hispanics who have even a small amount of plaque build-up in the neck artery that supplies blood to the brain are up to four times more likely to suffer or die from a stroke or heart attack than Hispanics who do not have plaque, according to a study published in the March 19, 2008, online issue of *Neurology*.

For the study, researchers used ultrasound to determine the thickness of the plaque in the carotid artery of 2,189 men and women who were part of the multi-ethnic Northern Manhattan Study. Carotid plaque was found in 58 percent of the group. The maximum carotid plaque thickness was defined as those who had more than 1.9 mm of plaque thickness, which represented one quarter of the group.

After an average follow-up of seven years, 121 people suffered or died from ischemic stroke, 118 suffered or died from heart attack and 166 died of other vascular causes.

The study found Hispanics with the thickest amounts of plaque had a three-to-four-fold increased risk of vascular events, such as stroke or heart attack, compared to Hispanics who did not have plaques.

“These results are important for developing stroke and vascular prevention programs for all, but also for certain ethnic groups such as Hispanics, who represent the fastest growing minority population in the U.S.,” said study author Tatjana Rundek, MD, PhD, with the Miller School of Medicine at the University of Miami in Florida. “More

research is needed though to determine why Hispanics with even small amounts of carotid plaque are particularly susceptible to vascular events.”

Rundek says their findings also show plaque thickness measured by ultrasound is a simple tool that can help doctors determine the risk of vascular events and guide stroke prevention therapies, regardless of ethnicity. “It is a non-invasive marker that can help doctors identify the beginning stages of atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries, that is also associated with increased risk of stroke.”

Source: American Academy of Neurology

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