

Migraine frequency linked with women's risk of cardiovascular disease

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New research shows women who have weekly migraine are significantly more likely to have a stroke than those with fewer migraines or no migraine at all, but those with lower migraine frequency may face increased risk of heart attacks. The research will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology 60th Anniversary Annual Meeting in Chicago, April 12–19, 2008.

The Women's Health Study involved 27,798 women health professionals in the United States who were 45 and older. The women did not have cerebrovascular disease at the beginning of the study and were followed for an average of 12 years. During that time, 706 cerebrovascular events, 305 heart attacks, and 310 ischemic strokes occurred.

Of the 3,568 women with migraine at the start of the study, 65 percent reported migraine less than once a month, 30 percent reported one migraine a month and five percent reported at least weekly migraine.

Compared to women without migraine, the study found women who had at least weekly migraines were three times more likely to have a stroke, but those with a migraine frequency of less than monthly were one-and-a-half times more likely to have a heart attack.

"Our findings suggest that migraine frequency may be an indicator for increased risk of cardiovascular disease, particularly ischemic stroke," said study author Tobias Kurth, MD, ScD, with Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School in Boston, and member of the American Academy of Neurology. "Future studies are needed to address whether migraine prevention reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease."

Overall, the study found a mixed association between migraine and major cerebrovascular disease suggesting increased risk for women with

high and low migraine frequency. "Our results may indicate that the mechanisms by which migraine associates with specific cardiovascular events may differ," said Kurth. "More research is needed to determine the reasons for these results."

Kurth says while migraine has previously been found to increase risk of vascular problems, before now there was little science on the association between migraine frequency and cardiovascular disease.

Source: American Academy of Neurology

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