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Stress Can Help Trigger Stroke

The notion that stress can help bring on a stroke may have merit, British researchers say. "If you divide the population into five different groups according to how severe their stress is, someone in the highest stress group, reporting the greatest stress, has a 40 percent increased risk of stroke than someone in the lowest group," said Paul G. Surtees, a psychologist at the University of Cambridge. "That is quite a difference." On the other hand, his team found no association between depression and stroke risk.

Reporting in the March 4 issue of *Neurology*, Surtees' group followed more than 20,000 British men and women, aged 41 to 80, for an average of 8.5 years. The participants answered questions on their levels of stress and depression, using standard measures of mental health. A total of 595 participants experienced a stroke during the study period, 167 of them fatal. The risk of stroke rose steadily with the amount of stress reported, the researchers said, and the relationship was not changed when other stroke risk factors -- such as smoking, blood pressure, obesity, diabetes and family history -- were factored in. The risk of stroke was *not* increased for participants who reported experiencing major depression at any time in their lives or who had had an episode of major depression in the past year. According to Surtees, the study was not designed to determine how stress might increase stroke risk. "We have thought about this, and we have concluded that the mechanism is linked to the ability to adapt to psychological stress," he said. "People differ considerably in the way they deal with stressful circumstances. The increase is probably due to that, but we need to follow it up."

The relationship might have a simple explanation, said Dr. Mark Goldberg, professor of neurology at Washington University in St. Louis. "People who are under a great deal of stress may not take medications that are prescribed for them," he speculated. Those medications would be aimed at conditions known to increase the risk of stroke -- high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes and the like, Goldberg said.

Stroke continued on page 2

Exercise Program Eases Arthritis

Exercise programs can help ease arthritis symptoms, says a U.S. study that evaluated the effects of an Arthritis Foundation regimen. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill study included 346 people, average age 70, with self-reported arthritis. Some were assigned to a group that followed the Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program, formerly called People with Arthritis Can Exercise (PACE), consisting of basic and advanced exercise classes twice a week for an hour a week for eight weeks. Others were put in a control group that did not take part in the exercise program. After eight weeks, people in the exercise group showed significant improvements in pain, fatigue and managing arthritis. The pain and fatigue improvements were still evident six months after completing the exercise program. The Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program emphasizes range-of-motion and low-resistance exercises, but the researchers found that people who completed the program also had increased strength in their upper and lower extremities.

This suggested that strength training -- a minor component of the program -- is effective. People in the exercise program did not show any increase in exercise endurance. The study was published in the January issue of *Arthritis Care & Research*. "Our findings indicate that the basic 8-week PACE (Arthritis Foundation Exercise) Program is a safe program for sedentary older individuals with arthritis to start exercising without exacerbating their symptoms," the researchers concluded. Further studies should be conducted to determine if offering the program more than twice a week and for longer periods offers additional benefits, they added. SOURCE: *Arthritis Care & Research*, news release, Jan. 4, 2008

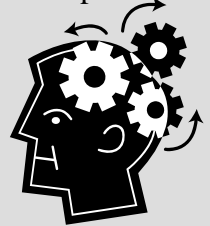


Brain Food



While there is no fountain of youth for the brain, neuroscience provides evidence for the next best thing. There are lots of things you can do right now to preserve, protect and enhance your gray matter. One hint: If you're already a devotee of a heart-healthy lifestyle, you're way ahead of the game. What's good for the heart is probably good for your head. That's twice the motivation and payoff.

Foods for thought - and memory. We are what we eat, the old adage goes. When it comes to brain fitness, eating certain types of food can improve and preserve our sharp-as-a-tack selves.



The strategy: Keep unhealthy fats to a minimum (no more than 20 percent of calories). Sticking to a Mediterranean style diet - lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, a minimum of red meat, plenty of fish, daily wine - is paramount.

Research shows cellular stress caused by oxidation can lead to cognitive declines. Choose dark-colored fruits and vegetables, including apricots, cantaloupes, watermelon, mangos, kale, chard, spinach and broccoli. Eating these foods increases the production of acetylcholine, a vital chemical released from nerve cells that improves communication between cells.

Salmon, mackerel, tuna, sardines and herring also give your brain a boost. What's key about these types of fish is their omega-3 fatty acids, specifically one called DHA, which is an essential component of neural cell membranes that helps to transmit information into and out of those membranes.

Brains are made up of about 60 percent fat, but the fuel they rely on is glucose, a simple sugar. To give your brain ample energy, eat complex carbohydrates such as brown rice, bulgur, quinoa, whole-wheat pasta and couscous. Whole grains are superior because they break down more slowly and don't cause big upswings in insulin production, which can cause a number of health problems associated with poor mental performance.

Source: Scott McCredie for MSN.com

Stroke continued from page 1

But the newly reported study does not mean that stress should be ranked among those leading risk factors, he said. The increased risk due to stress "is nothing compared to the relative risk of high blood pressure or smoking or all the other known risk factors," Goldberg said. "I don't think this should change our understanding of how we should deal with the risk of stroke," he said. Stress is associated with a number of conditions, Goldberg noted. "It increases the risk of infection, cancer and mental health problems," he said. "Ours was not a treatment study, so we are not free to comment on how the risk might be reduced," Surtees said. "If I were speculating, I would say that if people learn to deal with stresses in life more effectively, it might contribute to reducing their risk."

Source: Ed Edelson, HealthDay Reporter for MSN.com

Black Tea May Help Fight Diabetes

Certain ingredients in black tea could act as an insulin substitute and might help prevent type 2 diabetes, according to a study by researchers at Dundee University in Scotland.

They found that several components of black tea -- called theaflavins and thearubigins -- mimic the action of insulin, *BBC News* reported. Diabetes develops when the body fails to make enough insulin or use it properly.

"What we have found is that these constituents can mimic insulin action on proteins known as foxos," said team leader Dr. Graham Rena. "Foxos have previously been shown to underlie associations between diet and health in a wide variety of organisms including mice, worms and fruit flies."

Rena said the next step is to determine whether there's a way to translate these findings into something that could benefit humans, *BBC News* reported.

"People shouldn't be rushing to drink masses of black tea thinking it will cure them of diabetes. We are still some way from this leading to new treatments or dietary advice," he said. "Our research into tea compounds is at a preclinical, experimental stage and people with diabetes should continue to take their medication as directed by their doctor." The study was published in the journal *Aging Cell*.

Body Core Exercises

Lateral Roll



Keep torso parallel to the ground by contracting the abs and glutes. Ball is centered between the scapulas.



Roll to the side so that ball is now under one scapula. Repeat on other side.



Keep the abs and glutes contracted. Ball is centered between the scapulas.



With arms extended, rotate shoulders 90° while maintaining hip position parallel to ground.

Dumbbell Crunch



Keep abs and glutes contracted. Ball is under lumbar region. Extend weight above head.



Raise torso to 45° while pushing weight to ceiling. Maintain contraction in abs.



Keep abs and glutes contracted. Rest heels in middle of ball.



Force heels into ball to raise torso off ground. Maintain flat and rigid torso.

Body Core Exercises

Ball Push Up



Keep core (abs, glutes, legs) contracted while balancing on ball in push up position.



Push off ball into full extension. Keeping core contracted helps maintain balance and control.



Place shins on ball. Maintain rigid torso parallel to ground by keeping core contracted.



Bring knees into body as the ball rolls with the feet. Maintain contraction in abs and keep back flat.

Ball Reverse Crunch



Grip ball with feet and hamstrings. Contract abs while keeping back flat.



Raise knees to chest while maintaining ball in between legs. Maintain contraction in abs while keeping back flat.



Place elbow under shoulder. Contract core and raise torso, keeping body rigid. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat.



Place elbows under shoulders. Contract core and raise torso, keeping body rigid. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat.