
Better Get Moving: Moderate Exercise Cuts Women's Stroke Risk



Moderate exercise like brisk walking may cut women's stroke risk 20 percent and help offset some of the increased stroke risk in women taking postmenopausal hormone therapy.

According to the latest research presented at the American Stroke Association's International Stroke Conference 2014, women do not need to run marathons or do intense aerobics to reduce their stroke risk. Moderate-intensity exercise, such as brisk walking or playing tennis, may be sufficiently effective.

Sophia Wang, Ph.D., the study's lead author and professor in the department of population sciences within the Beckman Research Institute at the City of Hope in Duarte, California was surprised that moderate physical activity was most strongly associated with a reduced risk of stroke. Activities such as running did not prove to reduce women's stroke risk any further, and moderate activity, such as brisk walking appeared to be ideal.

Further findings showed that moderate exercise also helps offset the increased stroke risk that is present in postmenopausal women who take menopausal hormones, though it did not reduce it completely.

Researchers analysed information from more than 133,000 women in the California Teachers Study to find out how many suffered a stroke between the years 1996 and 2010. In comparison to those women who reported no activity in the three years before enrolling in the study, those who reported doing moderate physical activity were 20% less likely to suffer a stroke. Wang stated that the benefits of reducing risk of stroke were further observed among the group of women who had a sustained moderate level of physical activity over time.

For postmenopausal women who take menopausal hormone therapy the risk of stroke is more than 30% higher than for women who never used menopausal hormone therapy. Once the women stopped taking hormones, their risk began to diminish.

"The effects of physical activity and hormone therapy appear immediate and the benefits of physical activity are consistent in premenopausal and postmenopausal women," Wang said. Therefore, Wang recommends that women incorporate some type of physical activity into their daily routine. "You don't have to do an extreme boot camp. The types of activities we're talking about are accessible to most of the population." Power walking and recreational tennis, for example, do not necessarily require special memberships to gyms.

Furthermore, the team of researchers discovered an elevated stroke risk in women with diabetes, although this group encompassed women who also were overweight. As Wang explained, physical activity, obesity and diabetes are all highly correlated with one another, making stroke prevention among diabetics a particularly important scientific question to address.

Although 87% of the women were white, Wang said she believes the study's results may also apply to women in other racial and ethnic groups because the amount of stroke risk reduction was so robust. Further studies are needed to determine how much moderate exercise helps those with diabetes avoid strokes.

Source: [American Heart Association](#)

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