

Diet Loaded With Veggies, Fruits, Whole Grains May Cut Stroke Risk

Study Shows Women Have Lower Risk of Stroke if Their Diet Includes Lots of Antioxidants

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Dec. 1, 2011 -- Eating a [diet](#) loaded with antioxidant-rich vegetables, fruits, and whole grains may help women lower their chances of having a [stroke](#) -- even if they have a history of [heart disease](#) or stroke, a new study shows.

Antioxidants are certain vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients that may lower stroke risk by sopping up damaging molecules in our blood called free radicals, which have been linked to [heart](#) disease, stroke, and other diseases.

The study is published in *Stroke*.

Researchers led by Susanne Rautiainen, a PhD student at the Karolinska Institutet in Sweden, grouped 31,035 women without heart disease and 5,680 women with a history of heart disease. Then they measured the amount of antioxidant-rich foods and beverages they ate and drank.

About 11.5 years later, there were 1,322 strokes among women without a history of heart disease or stroke. Among women with previous heart disease or stroke, there were 1,007 strokes after about 10 years.

The amount of antioxidants in the diet seemed to make a difference in stroke risk, the study showed.

Women without a history of heart disease or stroke who ate diets loaded with antioxidants were 17% less likely to have any type of stroke, compared to women who ate the least amount of antioxidants. These results held even after researchers took into account [exercise](#), [smoking](#), and other behaviors that could affect stroke risk.

Among women with a history of heart disease or stroke, those who ate and drank the

most antioxidant-rich foods and drinks were 45% less likely to have a hemorrhagic stroke than women who ate the least.

Hemorrhagic strokes cause bleeding in the [brain](#) due to a ruptured blood vessel.

Protecting Against Heart Disease

Women with no previous heart disease or stroke got about half of their antioxidants from [fruits and vegetables](#). Other antioxidant-rich foods and drinks such as whole grains, tea, and chocolate were also a part of their diet.

"This study is showing that if you get your antioxidants in the form of foods in the diet, it could be protective against heart disease and stroke," says Suzanne Steinbaum, DO. She is the director of women and heart disease at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

Michael J. Katsnelson, MD, agrees that eating more fruits and vegetables is a healthy thing to do. He is the director of stroke services at University of Miami Hospital.

"Most stroke specialists do recommend eating more fruits, more vegetables, more omega-3 fatty acids, more nuts, and less saturated fat," he says.

More study is needed before the effects of this type of diet on stroke risk can be quantified. "The study is interesting and promising, but it needs to be replicated in other populations and men," Katsnelson says.

There are other ways to lower stroke risk, says Roger Bonomo, MD, director of stroke care at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York: "Of all of the things that can reduce your risk of stroke, [smoking cessation](#) is the one that makes the biggest difference."