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Migraines tied to cardiovascular problems among women

By [Andrew M. Seaman](http://uk.reuters.com/journalists/andrew-m-seaman)

(Reuters Health) - Women who suffer from migraines may be at an increased risk of cardiovascular problems like heart attacks and strokes, according to a new U.S. study.

Researchers analyzed data from 115,541 female nurses aged 25 to 42 who entered the study in 1989 and were followed through June 2011.

Initially, 17,531 women said they had a diagnosis of migraine from a doctor. Another 6,389 reported a migraine diagnosis during the 20 years of follow up.

During that time, there were also 1,329 cardiovascular events like heart attacks and strokes and 223 deaths related to cardiovascular disease among the women.

Women diagnosed with migraine were more likely to have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, a family history of heart attacks, to be smokers and be overweight.

After accounting for risk factors that may influence the women's risk for cardiovascular events, the researchers found women with migraines were 50 percent more likely to develop cardiovascular disease than women without the severe headaches.

The results are similar to those from a study of older U.S. women working in the health field, but limited to those who had migraines with aura. For the new study, the researchers didn't know if the women experienced migraine with aura.

Lead author Tobias Kurth, director of the Institute of Public Health Charite - Universitatsmedizin Berlin in Germany, said women shouldn't be scared by the new results. It's not known, he said, whether treating migraines would decrease the risk of cardiovascular events.

"We certainly hope we have the opportunity to study this, but at this point there is not data to make such statement," he said.

In an editorial, Drs. Rebecca Burch and Melissa Rayhill say the new study also raises the question of whether women with migraine should be treated with aspirin or cholesterol-lowering medicines called statins.

One analysis found that women with migraine who took aspirin actually had an increased risk of heart attack, they added.

"Thus, what little evidence we do have suggests the need for therapeutic restraint until we have a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying the link between migraine and vascular disease," wrote Burch, of Harvard Medical School in Boston, and Rayhill, of the State University of New York at Buffalo.