From the community: Could a migraine mean something more?

08/06/2016

The results of a new study may make your head hurt.

A team of scientists in Germany and the U.S. are suggesting a correlation between migraines and cardiovascular disease and death later in life.

Migraines most commonly affect women and are known for their pervasiveness and throbbing sensation. Many times, they are accompanied by something referred to as an aura, which is characterized by symptoms such as flashing lights, blind spots in one's vision and a loss of balance.

Researchers analyzed the health of more than 115,000 women aged 25-42 over the course of 22 years. Approximately 17,500 participants reported migraines in the beginning of the study, and upon follow-up, 1,329 experienced cardiovascular events, with 223 having died from cardiovascular disease.

Adjusting for factors such as smoking, hypertension, age, hormone therapy, etc., the risk of cardiovascular events and stroke was 50% higher in those women who experienced migraines than those who did not. The results led researchers to ascertain that migraines "should be considered an important risk marker for cardiovascular disease, at least in women."

"Previous research has often associated patients who have migraines with aura to an increased risk of stroke," says Dr. Ravi Ramana, a cardiologist at the Advocate Heart Institute at Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn, Ill. "And more recent research has suggested this may be related to various heart defects that can be "closed" with a relatively minor procedure. However, this study suggests a correlation-but not a cause-and-effect relationship-of women patients with migraines to have an increased risk of heart attacks. This may be due to the underlying cause of migraines as part of a systemic disorder affecting the blood vessels of the entire body."

"For now, migraine suffering may be used as a reason to further closely evaluate and treat these patients for their potential increased risk of heart disease," he says.

Although the research team only analyzed women participants, they anticipate the results would be the same for men. If you suffer from migraines, notify your primary care physician.

Do you know your risk for heart disease? Take Advocate Heart Institute's heart risk assessment here. If you are at high risk, see an Advocate cardiologist within 24 hours.

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