**Women who suffer migraines have a 50 per cent greater chance of developing a major heart or circulation problem**

* **Around 8 million Britons – three quarters of them women – have migraine**
* **Previous research had linked migraines to the risk of having a stroke**
* **Latest findings are based on a data from the US Nurses’ Health Study**
* **Women who have migraines are more likely to have high blood pressure**

By [BEN SPENCER MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT FOR THE DAILY MAIL](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?s=&authornamef=Ben+Spencer+Medical+Correspondent+For+The+Daily+Mail)

**PUBLISHED:** 00:13, 1 June 2016 | **UPDATED:** 08:27, 1 June 2016

Women who have migraines are far more likely to suffer heart attacks or strokes, experts warn.

A 20-year study of more than 115,000 nurses found that, overall, sufferers had a 50 per cent greater chance of developing major heart and circulation problems.

Nearly one in six were diagnosed with migraines at the beginning of the study, and they had a 39 per cent bigger risk of a heart attack, 62 per cent increased danger of stroke and 37 per cent higher likelihood of cardiovascular death.

Around eight million Britons – three quarters of them women – have migraine, which cause dizziness, nausea and crippling pain.

Previous research had linked migraines to the risk of having a stroke, but few studies have associated them with cardiovascular diseases in general.

The latest findings are based on a data from the US Nurses’ Health Study, which tracked 115,541 women from 1989 to 2011.

The women were 25 to 42 at the beginning of the project, and were free from angina and cardiovascular disease.

By the end of the study 1,329 had suffered major cardiovascular events, including 678 heart attacks and 651 strokes. In addition, 223 died as a result of heart problems.

Share

The researchers from Harvard Medical School said more research was needed to determine whether treatment to prevent migraines could cut these risks – but said anyone suffering migraines should have their heart risk assessed.

Women who have migraines are more likely to have high blood pressure and high cholesterol and be overweight.

But the scientists said that this was not the only link – and it may be that migraines are part of the same underlying biological problems that cause all ‘endovascular’ issues – those that effect the inside of the blood vessels.

Writing in the British Medical Journal, they said: ‘Evidence suggests that the pathophysiology of migraine can also be viewed in part as a systemic disorder affecting the endovascular system.’

The authors, who included German scientists from the Institute of Public Health in Berlin, added: ‘These results further add to the evidence that migraine should be considered an important risk marker for cardiovascular disease, at least in women.’

In a linked editorial, Rebecca Burch, of Harvard Medical School, and Melissa Rayhill, from the State University of New York at Buffalo, cautioned that women should not be worried about the link.

They stressed that individual women were at very low risk – even if they had migraines.

The 223 women who died of heart problems represented less than 0.2 per cent of all participants. This risk was higher among migraine patients, but still tiny.

‘The magnitude of the risk should not be over-emphasized,’ they said. ‘It is small at the level of the individual patient, but still important at a population level.’

Experts had already called for people who suffer the worst migraines to get cholesterol-reducing statins automatically as a precaution to cut their heart risk, even though the link with heart issues had not been proven.