**PAIN IN THE HEAD**

# **Migraine sufferers are ‘MORE likely to suffer a stroke after surgery’**

The risk was found to be greatest for those people who suffer migraine aura, where they see flashing lights

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PEOPLE plagued by agonising migraines are more likely to suffer a stroke after surgery, experts have warned.

The risk is highest for sufferers who see flashing lights and experience other warning signs before their migraines strike, known as an aura.

Experts say their findings mean all patients must be quizzed about their history of migraines before undergoing an op.

They believe migraine sufferers could be genetically more likely to suffer a stroke.

And they suggest they have a greater risk of cerebral ischemia – where there isn’t enough blood flow to the brain, therefore increasing the risk of stroke.

Last year the NHS performed 10 million operations – stroke is a known complication of any surgery.

Stroke is the fourth biggest killer in the UK, and is second across the world.

It kills twice as many women as breast cancer and more men than prostate and testicular cancer combined.

Migraines are often seen as a minor condition, despite the increased risk of stroke.

But, one in seven people suffer migraines, with around 190,000 attacks plaguing people in the UK each day.

Harvard experts said: “Given the high prevalence of migraine in the general population, the migraine-perioperative ischemic stroke association carries public health importance.

“Physicians should be aware of this increased perioperative risk, particularly in patients with migraine who present without traditional risk factors for stroke.”

Researchers at Harvard Medical School, led by Matthias Eikermann, studied 124,558 surgical patients at Massachusetts General Hospital and two other hospitals, between January 2007 and August 2014.

The average age of the patients was 52, and just over half were women.

Of the 124,558 surgical cases, 771 patients suffered a strokeOf all those stroke patients, 89 had migraine – including 18 who had migraine with aura and 71 without aura.

The researchers estimate that 2.4 strokes occur in every 1,000 surgical patients.

But, that risk increases to 4.3 strokes in every 1,000 patients with migraine diagnosis – 3.9 for migraine with aura and 6.3 for migraine without aura.

The researchers found the risk remained, even after taking into account other factors that could trigger a stroke, or those linked to surgery.

These included age, sex and a history of vascular disease that increase stroke risk.

The findings suggest migraine patients given high doses of drugs called vasopressors, which stabilise blood pressure during surgery, could be at even greater risk of suffering a stroke.

As could those migraine patients who have a cardiac shunt fitted, to allow blood to flow from the right heart chambers to the left.

There are two types of stroke, ischaemic is the most common and is caused by a blockage, cutting off blood and the oxygen supply to the brain.

The second type is a haemorrhagic stroke, caused by bleeding in or around the brain.

The findings are published in the BMJ.