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Stroke risk similar among men and women smokers worldwide

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Smoking cigarettes may cause similar stroke risks for men and women, but women smokers may be at greater risk for a more deadly and uncommon type of stroke, according to new research in the American Heart Association journal *Stroke*.

When compared to non-smokers of the same gender, smoking increases the risk of having any type of stroke by 60 to 80 percent in women and men.

Researchers said the finding is intriguing because other studies have found strong evidence that smoking conveys a much higher risk of heart disease – which shares a common disease process with stroke – for women than for men.

Researchers compared data from more than 80 international studies that were published between 1966 and 2013. They found that smoking is linked to more than a 50 percent greater risk of ischemic stroke the most common stroke – one that's caused by a blood clot– in both men and women. However, for the more deadly type of stroke – one that is caused by a brain bleed, known as a hemorrhagic stroke – smoking resulted in a 17 percent greater risk in women than in men.

Moreover, compared to men who smoke, the risk for women who smoke was about 10 percent higher in Western countries – possibly reflecting a greater cumulative exposure to smoking – than in Asian countries.

The study also found evidence that men and women who smoke can significantly reduce their stroke risk by quitting smoking.

Researchers suggested that the greater risk for bleeding stroke among women might be due to hormones and how nicotine impacts blood fats. It seems that fats, cholesterol and triglycerides increase to a greater extent in women who smoke compared with men who smoke, increasing their risk for coronary heart disease to a greater extent than in male smokers.

"Cigarette smoking is a major risk factor for stroke for both men and women, but fortunately, quitting smoking is a highly effective way to lower your stroke risk," said Rachel Huxley, lead author of the study and Professor, School of Population Health, University of Queensland, in Brisbane, Australia. "Tobacco control policies should be a mainstay of primary stroke prevention programs."

Provided by American Heart Association

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