

Mid-life headaches may increase risk of vision problems

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Middle-aged men and women with a history of migraine and other headaches are more likely to have retinopathy, damage to the retina of the eye which can lead to severe vision problems or blindness, than those without a history of headaches, according to a study published in the May 15, 2007, issue of *Neurology*, the scientific journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

For the study, researchers reviewed the headache history and eye health of 10,902 men and women who participated in the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) study. Participants, who were from communities in Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, and North Carolina, were African American and white, and between the ages of 51 and 71 at the time of their examination.

Twenty-two percent of the participants had a history of migraine or other headaches. Those with a history of headaches were slightly younger, more likely to be female, and more likely to be white than those without a history of headaches.

The study found people with headaches were between 1.3 and 1.5 times more likely to have retinopathy than those without headaches. Among participants who did not have a history of diabetes or hypertension, the association was stronger and limited to those with migraine headaches and other headaches with aura, or visual disturbances.

"Middle-aged people with a history of migraine and other headaches are

more likely to have retinopathy," said the study's lead author Kathryn M. Rose, PhD, with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "This association persisted after controlling for diabetes, glucose levels, cigarette smoking, blood pressure, and use of blood pressure medications."

"Our findings suggest that problems in the circulatory system of small blood vessels may be an underlying factor. This is possible given that anatomically and physiologically small blood vessels in the retina and brain are similar," said Rose. "Our findings are also consistent with a previous study linking both migraine and retinopathy with the occurrence of stroke."

Source: American Academy of Neurology

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