

'Cafeteria diet' hastens stroke risk

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The fat- and sugar-rich Western diet leads to a lifetime of health problems, dramatically increasing the risk of stroke or death at a younger age, according to a study presented today at the Canadian Stroke Congress.

Researchers found that a high-calorie, high-sugar, high-sodium diet nicknamed the 'cafeteria diet' induced most symptoms of metabolic syndrome – a combination of high levels of cholesterol, blood sugar, blood pressure and obesity – in rats after only two months.

The animals were at an age roughly equivalent to 16 to 22 years in humans at the time of disease onset, according to lead researcher Dr. Dale Corbett, scientific director of the Heart and Stroke Foundation Centre for [Stroke Recovery](#).

"I think we'll soon start to see people in their 30s or 40s having strokes, having dementia, because of this junk food diet," says Dr. Corbett. "Young people will have major, major problems much earlier in life."

Researchers gave sedentary rats unlimited access to both nutritional [food pellets](#) and a daily selection of common junk food items including cookies, sausage and cupcakes. Animals were also given access to both water and a 30 per cent sucrose solution designed to imitate [soft drinks](#). Like humans, the animals greatly preferred to consume the treats.

Dr. Corbett highlights the importance of preventing metabolic syndrome with regular exercise and a [balanced diet](#). "We're not sure whether

metabolic syndrome can be reversed. If it can't, and we continue to live and eat like this, then we're each a ticking time bomb of health problems."

"[Metabolic syndrome](#) and stroke are huge health concerns for the public," says Dr. Mark Bayley, Co-Chair of the Canadian Stroke Congress and Medical Director of the Neurological Rehabilitation Program at Toronto Rehab. "We cannot afford to continue making poor nutritional choices. Our diet is killing us."

In addition to warning the Canadian public about the health dangers of a [poor diet](#), the researchers' study opens the door to further research.

"Laboratory models often use relatively young animals who are healthier and on better diets than we are," says Dr. Corbett. "However, it is important to remember that for many people, the consequences would be even worse, since a lot of people with stroke also have pre-existing health problems."

Provided by Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

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