

Migraine with aura may lead to heart attack, blood clots for women

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Women who have migraines with aura, which are often visual disturbances such as flashing lights, may be more likely to have problems with their heart and blood vessels, and those on newer contraceptives may be at higher risk for blood clots, according to two studies released today that will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology's 65th Annual Meeting in San Diego, March 16 to 23, 2013.

The first study showed that migraine with aura is a strong contributor to the development of major [cardiovascular events](#) such as heart attack and stroke. The Women's [Health Study](#) involved 27,860 women, 1,435 of whom had migraine with aura. During the 15-year study, there were 1,030 cases of heart attack, stroke or death from a cardiovascular cause. The study examined the relative contribution of various [vascular risk factors](#) to these major cardiovascular events.

"After [high blood pressure](#), migraine with aura was the second strongest single contributor to risk of heart attacks and strokes," said study author Tobias Kurth, MD, ScD, of [INSERM](#), the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research in Bordeaux and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Kurth is also a Fellow of the American Academy of Neurology. "It came ahead of diabetes, current smoking, obesity, and family history of early heart disease."

Kurth cautioned that while people with migraine with aura have an increased risk, it does not mean that everyone with migraine with aura

will have a [heart attack](#) or stroke. He said people with migraine with aura can reduce their risk in the same ways others can, such as not smoking, keeping blood pressure low and weight down and exercising.

The second study looked at women with migraine who take [hormonal contraceptives](#) and the occurrence of [blood clots](#). The study involved women with migraine with and without aura who were taking both newer contraceptives such as the contraceptive patch and ring and older contraceptives. Of the 145,304 women who used the contraceptives, 2,691 had migraine with aura and 3,437 had migraine without aura.

Women with migraine with aura were more likely to have experienced blood clot complications such as deep vein thrombosis with all types of contraceptives than women with migraine without aura. For example, 7.6 percent of women with migraine with aura who used a newer generation combined hormonal contraceptive had deep vein thrombosis compared to 6.3 percent of women with migraine without aura, but the timing of the two events is not clear. The occurrence of blood clot complications was also higher in women with migraine who took contraceptives than women taking the contraceptives who did not have migraine.

"Women who have migraine with aura should be sure to include this information in their medical history and talk to their doctors about the possible higher risks of newer contraceptives, given their condition," said study author Shivang Joshi, MD, MPH, RPh, of Brigham and Women's Falkner Hospital in Boston and a member of the American Academy of Neurology.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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