

Migraine as a risk marker for stroke and heart attack

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Women who suffer from migraine headaches have a slightly increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease in later life. A team of researchers led by Prof. Tobias Kurth, Head of the Institute of Public Health (IPH) at Charité - Universitätsmedizin Berlin, has now been able to establish the following: female migraine patients have a higher risk of stroke or heart attacks than women without migraine. Their findings are based on an analysis of data collected as part of the US-based Nurses' Health Study II, and have been published in the *British Medical Journal*.

According to the Professional Association of German Neurologists (BDN), [migraine headaches](#) have a high prevalence in the general population, and affect approximately one in five women. While migraines are known to be linked to an increased risk of stroke, only a few studies exist that demonstrate the relationship of migraines with increased risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality. A team of US and German researchers have now analyzed data from more than 115,500 women enrolled in the Nurses' Health Study II.

The participants were aged between 25 and 42 years at baseline and free from cardiovascular disease and, of them, 17,531 (just over 15%) reported a physician's diagnosis of migraine. Between 1989 and 2011, cardiovascular events were observed in 1,329 of these women; 223 died as a result. "Our analysis suggests that migraine should be considered an important risk marker for cardiovascular disease, particularly in women," concludes Prof. Kurth, adding that: "The risk of developing cardiovascular events was shown to be 50% higher in women with a

diagnosis of migraine. When compared to women unaffected by the condition, the risk of developing a [heart attack](#) was 39% higher for women with migraine, the risk of having a stroke 62% higher, and that of developing angina 73% higher."

While the study included a large number of vascular risk factors, no information was available on individual biomarkers, or migraine specifics such as the presence or absence of migraine aura. Further research will therefore be necessary in order to identify the underlying causes responsible for these links, and to develop preventative treatments. The question of whether male migraine sufferers also have an increased risk of [cardiovascular disease](#) remains to be elucidated. "Migraine has a high prevalence in the general population. Consequently, there is an urgent need to understand the biological mechanisms and processes to provide preventative solutions for patients with migraine."

More information: Tobias Kurth et al, Migraine and risk of cardiovascular disease in women: prospective cohort study, *BMJ* (2016). [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.i2610](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.i2610)

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