Can Soda Increase Women's Cardiovascular Risk?

Women who drink too much soda and other sweet thirst quenchers are more likely to be stricken by stroke.

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Too much sugar isn't good for anyone. This is especially true for women who indulge in sugary drinks, according to findings published in the Journal of the American Heart Association (AHA), which suggest that consuming one or more such beverages a day puts women at a greater risk for cardiovascular disease, reports AHA.

For their inquiry, researchers relied on 25 years of data from the ongoing California Teacher's Study that included more than 106,000 women who hadn't been diagnosed with heart disease, stroke or diabetes at the study's baseline. The women's average age was 52.

Participants were required to report the beverages they drank and in what quantities. Sugary drinks included caloric soft drinks, sweetened bottled waters or teas, and sugared fruit drinks.

Researchers used statewide inpatient hospitalization records to determine whether women experienced any cardiovascular events.

Results showed that compared with women who didn't or rarely drank sugary libations, women who guzzled any of these drinks on a daily basis were more likely to need surgery for clogged arteries (a 26% increase) and to suffer a stroke (a 21% increase). Women who drank more sugar-added fruit drinks saw their risk for cardiovascular disease increase by 42%, while those who drank soft drinks, such as soda, registered a 23% higher risk.

Scientists noted that women who drank more sugary drinks also tended to be younger, obese, more likely to smoke and less likely to eat healthy foods.

Sugar can increase cardiovascular disease by raising glucose levels and insulin concentrations in the blood, thus increasing hunger and leading to obesity, a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease, explained Cheryl Anderson, PhD, professor and interim chair of family and public health at the University of California San Diego, chair of the AHA's nutrition committee and the study's lead author.

“In addition, too much sugar in the blood is associated with oxidative stress and inflammation, insulin resistance, unhealthy cholesterol profiles and type 2 diabetes, conditions that are strongly linked to the development of atherosclerosis, the slow narrowing of the arteries that underlies most cardiovascular disease,” Anderson added.

This is why the AHA recommends limiting sugar intake to no more than 100 calories (6 teaspoons of sugar, or 25 grams) a day for most women. For most men, the agency advises that no more than 150 calories, or 9 teaspoons of sugar or 38 grams, should be consumed.

What about diet sodas? Forget these fizzy, sweetened beverages, experts advise. Drinking just plain water is the best bet for staying healthy.

For related coverage, read “Ladies, Say No to Diet Beverages” and “Excessive Consumption of Sugary Drinks Linked to Increased Death.”

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