Insomniacs May Face Increased Risk of Heart Disease and Stroke

This disorder can trigger coronary artery disease, heart failure and obstructed blood vessels to the brain.

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, insomnia is characterized by the inability to initiate or maintain sleep. Now, findings published in the American Heart Association's (AHA) journal Circulation suggest that this common sleep disorder, which affects up to 30% of the general population, is associated with a higher risk of heart disease and stroke, reports AHA.

For the study, researchers drew 1.3 million people with or without heart disease and stroke from four major public studies and groups. Scientists used a technique called Mendelian randomization—which uses genetic variants, or variations, known to be connected with a potential risk factor—to decrease bias in results.

Findings showed that genetic variations for the sleep disorder were likely to lead to heart disease and stroke. That is, such variations were linked increasingly and significantly to higher odds of developing coronary disease, heart failure and ischemic stroke, particularly large-artery stroke.

One limitation of the study was that the results only represented a genetic variant link to the insomnia rather than individuals' actual inability to fall asleep. In addition, researchers were also unable to determine if folks with cardiovascular disease also suffered from insomnia.

"It's important to identify the underlying reason for insomnia and treat it," said Susanna Larsson, PhD, an associate professor of cardiovascular and nutritional epidemiology at Karolinska Institutet, in Stockholm, and the study's lead author. "Sleep is a behavior that can be changed by new habits and stress management."

Click here to learn how amber-tinted glasses might help to relieve insomnia.

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