

It's Not Too Late for Middle-Aged Women to Lower Stroke Risk

Lifestyle changes, such as smoking cessation and exercise, can lower women's total risk of stroke by 25%.

April 14, 2020 By [Alicia Green](#)

Women are more likely than men to suffer and die of stroke as well as face poorer health and physical function after this cardiovascular event. Now, a new [study](#) published by the American Stroke Association (ASA) journal *Stroke* suggests that middle-aged women can reduce their stroke risk by choosing good lifestyle habits, such as exercising, maintaining a healthy weight, eating healthy foods and quitting smoking, reports [ASA](#).

For the study, researchers reviewed the Nurses' Health Study, which includes the health information of nearly 60,000 women who enrolled in the study at an average age of 52 and participated for an average of 26 years. Scientists then studied the impact of smoking cessation, exercising at least 30 minutes daily and gradual weight loss (if women were overweight) on stroke risk.

In addition, researchers also examined the effects of diets that incorporated more fish, nuts, whole grains, fruits and vegetables and less red meat, no processed meat and less alcohol.

Over a 26-year period, findings showed that 4.7% of women with no lifestyle changes experienced a stroke of any type, 2.4% suffered an ischemic stroke and 0.7% sustained a hemorrhagic stroke.

Scientists determined that women who quit smoking, exercised daily and lost weight reduced their total risk of stroke by 25% and ischemic stroke by 36%. What's more, those who sustained dietary changes also saw their total risk of stroke lowered by 23%.

Additionally, individuals who increased their fish and nut consumption and decreased their intake of unprocessed red meat intake reduced their risk of stroke. (These dietary changes, however, didn't have as much of an impact as the effects of increased physical activity, smoking cessation and maintaining a healthy weight.)

This observational study focused on women, but other research shows that lifestyle and dietary changes can also impact stroke risk in men, said Goodarz Danaei, ScD, a professor of cardiovascular health at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the study's lead author.

“We also estimate that exercising 30 minutes or more daily may reduce the risk of stroke by 20%,” Danaei added.

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