

An apple or a pear every day may help protect against strokes

Apples and pears may keep strokes away.

That's the conclusion of a Dutch study published in *Stroke: Journal of the American Heart Association*, in which researchers found that eating a lot of fruits and vegetables with white flesh may protect against stroke.

While previous studies have linked high consumption of fruits and vegetables with lower stroke risk, the researchers' work is the first to examine associations of fruit and vegetable color groups with stroke.

The color of the edible portion of fruits and vegetables reflects the presence of beneficial phytochemicals such as carotenoids and flavonoids.

Researchers examined the link between fruits and vegetable color group consumption with 10-year stroke inci-

dence in a population-based study of 20,069 adults, with an average age of 41. The participants were free of cardiovascular diseases at the start of the study and completed a 178-item food frequency questionnaire for the previous year.

Fruits and vegetables were classified in four color groups:

- Green, including dark leafy vegetables, cabbages and lettuces
- Orange/Yellow, which were mostly citrus fruits
- Red/Purple, which were mostly red vegetables
- White, of which 55 percent were apples and pears

During 10 years of follow-up, 233 strokes were documented. Green, orange/yellow and red/purple fruits and vegetables weren't related to stroke. However, the risk of stroke incidence was 52 percent lower for

people with a high intake of white fruits and vegetables compared to people with a low intake.

Each 25 gram per day increase in white fruits and vegetable consumption was associated with a nine percent lower risk of stroke. An average apple is 120 grams.

"To prevent stroke, it may be useful to consume considerable amounts of white fruits and vegetables," said Linda M. Oude Griep, M.Sc., lead author of the study and a postdoctoral fellow in human nutrition at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. "For example, eating one apple a day is an easy way to increase white fruits and vegetable intake.

"However, other fruits and vegetable color groups may protect against other chronic diseases. Therefore, it remains

of importance to consume a lot of fruits and vegetables."

Apples and pears are high in dietary fiber and a flavonoid called quercetin. In the study, other foods in the white category were bananas, cauliflower, chicory and cucumber. Potatoes were classified as a starch.

Previous research on the preventive health benefits of fruits and vegetables focused on the food's unique nutritional value and characteristics, such as the edible part of the plant, color, botanical family and its ability to provide antioxidants.

U.S. federal dietary guidelines include using color to assign nutritional value. The U.S. Preventive Health Services Taskforce recommends selecting each day vegetables from five subgroups: dark green, red/orange, legume, starchy and other vegetables.

Before the results are adopted into everyday practice, the

findings should be confirmed through additional research, Oude Griep said. "It may be too early for physicians to advise patients to change their dietary habits based on these initial findings," she said.

An accompanying editorial notes that the finding should be interpreted with caution because food frequency questionnaires may not be reliable. In addition, "the observed reduction in stroke risk might further be due to a generally healthier lifestyle of individuals consuming a diet rich in fruits and vegetables," writes Heike Wersching, M.D., M.Sc., of Institute of Epidemiology and Social Medicine at the University of Münster, in Germany.

Study co-authors are: W.M. Monique Verschuren, Ph.D.; Daan Kromhout, M.P.H., Ph.D.; Marga C. Ocké, Ph.D.; and Johanna M. Geleijnse, Ph.D. Author disclosures are on the manuscript.

September is Cholesterol Awareness Month

Have you had your cholesterol levels checked?

September is National Cholesterol Awareness Month — a good time to find out what your cholesterol numbers are, to learn about your risk for high cholesterol and what you can do to keep your levels in check.

More than 98 million Americans 20 and older have high blood cholesterol — one of the most controllable risk factors for heart disease and stroke, according to the American Heart Association.

High cholesterol doesn't always have symptoms. So it's important to have your doctor check your cholesterol levels starting at least by age 20, and earlier if you have a family history of heart disease.

The two types of cholesterol are high-density lipoprotein, or HDL ("good" cholesterol), and low-density lipoprotein, or LDL ("bad" cholesterol).

Too much bad cholesterol or not enough good cholesterol can increase your risk for heart disease or stroke. The ideal cholesterol level for most people is less than 200 mg/dL.

The amount of triglycerides (or blood fats) in blood is another important barometer of your health; high levels are associated with coronary heart disease, diabetes and fatty liver disease. Your doctor can measure your triglyceride levels with the same test for cholesterol. A normal triglyceride level should be less than 150 mg/dL.


Your liver and other cells in your body make about 75 percent of blood cholesterol. LDL cholesterol is produced naturally by the body, but many

people inherit genes from their mother, father or grandparents that cause them to make too much. The other 25 percent comes from the foods you eat.

The kinds and amounts of foods you eat, weight, physical activity and exposure to tobacco may affect your cholesterol and triglyceride levels. These factors may be controlled by:

- Eating a heart-healthy dietary pattern.
- Engaging in physical activity.
- Controlling your blood pressure.
- Maintaining a healthy weight.
- Not smoking and avoiding being around others who do.

The American Heart Association has information and tools about cholesterol and how to reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke at www.heart.org/cholesterol.



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