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Fruit and veg 'cut stroke risk'

Eating more than the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day can cut risk of stroke, a study says.

People who ate three to five cut the risk by 11% compared with those eating fewer than three, The Lancet reported.



Fruit is part of a healthy diet

It was 26% lower for people who ate more than five servings, University of London researchers found in the study of data on more than 257,500 people.

The Department of Health says five or more daily portions cuts risk of heart disease, cancer and other problems.

Stroke is the third leading cause of death and the most common cause of disability in most developed countries.

The researchers pooled data from eight studies from Europe, Japan and the US.

Lead researcher Dr Feng He said a diet including lots of fruit and vegetables was also likely to further reduce the risk of other forms of cardiovascular disease, and some cancers.

Professor Graham MacGregor, who also worked on the study, said: "It is a very important finding because it really shows that the quantity of fruit and vegetables you should be eating is more than five a day."

Fruit and vegetables are full of nutrients such as vitamin C, beta carotene and potassium as well as plant proteins and dietary fibre.

They are also less dense in calories, have very little fat and contain beneficial antioxidants.

However, the researchers suspect that potassium may be the

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STROKE

- ◆ More than 150,000 people in the UK have a stroke each year
- ◆ Strokes kill an estimated 67,000 people in the UK each year
- ◆ More than 250,000 Britons live with a severe disability caused by stroke

A SERVING

- ◆ Vegetables: 77 grams (2.7 ounces)
- ◆ Fruit: 80 grams (2.8 ounces)

most important factor in preventing stroke.

Professor MacGregor said: "We know that if you give people additional potassium it lowers blood pressure.

"By increasing to five servings a day from three you would increase your potassium intake by about 50%."


Simple changes

Joe Korner, of the Stroke Association, said: "This latest research is very important because it shows just how significant this simple lifestyle change can be in reducing strokes.

"Simply increasing daily intake of fruit and vegetables to five or more a day could reduce the number of strokes by 26%. In the UK that would mean nearly 40,000 strokes a year.

"At least a further 20,000 (14%) strokes could be prevented by better control of high blood pressure through reducing salt intake, better exercise and stopping smoking."

Professor Gareth Beevers, from the Blood Pressure Association, said the study highlighted the need for health educators to provide clear, practical information about the sorts of foods which everyone should be eating.

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