Brain Health Score Can Help Women ID Their Stroke Risk

The McCance Center for Brain Care Score is an evidence-based tool that can help women reduce one's stroke risk.

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Mass General Brigham researchers found that the McCance Brain Care Score (BCS) can help predict the risk for stroke and other cerebrovascular events, according to a study published in Neurology.

Stroke is a leading cause of death among women in the United States. In fact, one in five U.S. women between ages 55 and 75 are expected to experience a stroke during their lifetime. What's more, Black women are about two times more likely than white women to have a stroke, according to the American Heart Association.

Staying healthy and active supports brain health by maintaining good blood flow to the brain, which can help reduce the risk for stroke, heart disease, dementia, depression and other brain diseases.

Using a scale from 0 to 21 points, BCS measures brain health, incorporating 12 modifiable risk factors, including physical components (blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol levels and body mass index), lifestyle factors (alcohol intake, diet, smoking, physical activity and sleep) and social-emotional factors (social relationships, stress and sense of meaning in life), according to a Mass General Brigham new release.

For the study, researchers pooled data from about 21,270 women with a median age of about 58 participating in the Women's Health Study, a clinical trial led by Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Women with a higher BCS score had a reduced risk for cerebrovascular events across their lifetime. At a median 22.4 years follow-up, about 6.1% (1,294) of women experienced a stroke or transient ischemic attack, also called a mini stroke.

A five-point higher baseline BCS was associated with a 37% decrease in the risk for a cerebrovascular event after adjusting for age, menopausal status, use of hormonal replacement therapy and other known cardiovascular disease risk factors.

“Our findings underscore that the McCance Brain Care Score is a valuable tool for predicting cerebrovascular event risk in women, for whom stroke remains a leading cause of death,” said senior author Nirupama Yechoor, MD, MSC, of the department of neurology at Massachusetts General Hospital, in the news release. “Our study further highlights the need for broader, long-term research across diverse populations and to investigate how changes in scores over the lifespan impact the risk of stroke and related events.”

To learn your brain care score, go here. To learn about ways to improve your score and browse resources for improving brain health, including ways to lower blood pressure, improve diet, limit alcohol and reduce stress, go here.

To read more, click #Stroke. There, you’ll see headlines such as “NIH-Funded Study Identifies Potential New Stroke Treatment,” “Statins May Improve Artery Health in People With HIV” and “Too Much Sitting Linked to Increase Risk for Heart Disease.”

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