Smoking Leads to Greater Risk of Aneurysms in Middle-Aged Women

Compared with nonsmokers, women smokers' risk of this condition was four times higher—seven if they suffered from hypertension.

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Middle-aged women who smoke now have one more reason to quit. New study findings published in the Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry suggest that puffing cigarettes raises their risk of developing an aneurysm, reports HealthDay News.

About 6.5 million Americans are suspected to harbor an unruptured aneurysm, a weakened, bulging section of an artery that can sometimes burst and cause fatal bleeding.

For the study, scientists examined the brain scans of 545 women between ages 30 to 60. Scan results showed unruptured brain aneurysms in 152 of these women.

Compared with nonsmokers, individuals who smoked had a fourfold increased risk of having an aneurysm, while those with chronic hypertension faced a sevenfold higher risk.

Heavier smokers (those who smoked 20 versus 12 cigarettes a day) were more likely to have an aneurysm than those who had normal brain scans. Women with a brain aneurysm also smoked for longer (29 years on average versus 20 years).

Researchers found that doctors prescribed most brain scans because women complained of a persistent headache, which occurred in about 63% of those with an aneurysm and only 44% of those without the condition.

Investigators noted that it's been five years since the American Heart Association released updated guidelines on managing aneurysms.

"Consideration should be given to screening for [unruptured brain aneurysms] in women aged between 30 and 60 years who smoke cigarettes," proposed Christopher Ogilvy, MD, a researcher with the neurosurgical service at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard Medical School in Boston.

This would be greatly beneficial, as previous research suggests that aneurysms are more common

in women and in smokers.

For related coverage, read “Smoking Increases Risk for Serious Heart Attack Among Women.”

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