

Good physical function after age 40 tied to reduced risk of stroke

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People who have good physical function after the age of 40 may lower their risk of stroke by as much as 50 percent compared to people who are not able to climb stairs, kneel, bend, or lift as well, according to research published in the December 11, 2007, issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

For the study, researchers examined 13,615 men and women in the United Kingdom from 1993 to 1997 who were between the ages of 40 and 79 and had not suffered a stroke, heart attack or cancer. Participants were then asked to complete a self-reported test on their physical function 18 months later that looked at how well they were able to climb stairs, carry groceries, kneel, bend and lift. Researchers monitored how many strokes were suffered in this group through 2005.

The study found that people who scored in the top quartile on the physical function test had a 50-percent lower risk of stroke than those with the lowest test scores. This finding remained unchanged after adjusting for age, sex, body mass index, high blood pressure, cholesterol, smoking, diabetes, physical activity, social class, alcohol consumption and respiratory function.

The study also found for every increase of 10 points on the test, men had a reduced risk of stroke by 19 percent and women had a 29 percent lower stroke risk.

“People who reported better physical health had significantly lower risk

of stroke,” said study author Phyo Kyaw Myint, MRCP, with the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. “This is independent of the known risk factors for stroke in the general population.”

Myint says people with poor physical function may represent a high risk population for stroke. “This physical function test may identify apparently healthy men and women at an increased risk of stroke who may benefit the most from preventative treatments.”

Myint says it’s also possible that poor physical function may reflect underlying health issues, such as chronic inflammation, which may lead to vascular disease. He says increasing physical activity and eating more fruits and vegetables, which has been associated with better physical function, may also help to reduce stroke risk.

Source: American Academy of Neurology

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