

# Fats increase stroke risk in women

NEW STRAITS Times 09/05/2010 MS 11

**A** MOMENT on the lips, forever on the hips? A bad figure is hardly the worst of it. Eating a lot of fat, especially the kind in cookies and pastries, can significantly raise the risk of stroke for women over 50, a large new study finds.

The new study is the largest to look at stroke risk in women and across all types of fat. It showed a clear trend: Those who ate the most fat had a 44 per cent higher risk of the most common type of stroke compared to those who ate the least.

We already know that diets rich in fat, particularly artery-clogging trans fat, are bad for the heart and the waistline.

Researchers from University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in the United States looked at 87,230 participants in the Women's Health Initiative, a federally funded study best known for revealing health risks from taking hormone pills for menopause symptoms.

Before menopause, women traditionally have had less risk of stroke

## HEALTH NEWS IN BRIEF

The American Heart Association recommends limiting fat to less than 25 to 35 per cent of total calories, and trans fat to less than one per cent. The healthiest fats come from nuts, seeds, fish and vegetable oils. — AP

### Shift may cause bowel disorders

ROTATING shift work can wreak havoc with bodily functions such as sleep and bowel movements. Now study findings hint that rotating work schedules may also increase the risk of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome include constipation and diarrhoea, abdominal pain, cramping and bloating.

Researchers at University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in the US evaluated bowel disorders among 399 nurses and found that rotating



Eating a lot of fat can significantly increase the risk of stroke for women over 50

than similarly aged men, although this is changing as women increasingly battle obesity and other health problems.

After menopause, the risk rises and the gender advantage disappears. After taking into account other factors that affect stroke risk — weight, race, smoking, exercise and use of alcohol, aspirin or hormone pills — the researchers concluded that women who ate the most fat had a 44 per cent greater risk of stroke.

They also found a 30 per cent greater risk of stroke among women eating the most trans fat, which is common in stick margarine, fried foods, crackers and cookies.

US federal health statistics show that on average, American women in their 50s and 60s eat 63g-68g of fat a day. A little context: A 60g Snickers bar contains 14g of fat, a 60g bag of Crunchy Cheetos has 20g, as does a Haagen-Dazs ice-cream bar.

work schedules, which commonly disrupt the intestinal tract's rhythm, are "associated with a greater chance of having irritable bowel syndrome".

They assessed self-reported bowel disorders and sleep quality among mostly female nurses with no other conditions potentially associated with bowel dysfunction.

The investigators found reports of sleeping badly, having trouble falling asleep, and daytime sleepiness all more common among nurses with IBS, regardless of their work shift.

But working a rotating shift remained significantly associated with IBS even after taking into account sleep quality, age, gender, years of experience, and number of years working night or rotating shifts.

Nurses working night and rotating shifts were also more likely to report abdominal pain or discomfort than their day-working peers. — Reuters

### Prostate cancer linked to smoking

SMOKING may increase a man's risk of developing and dying from prostate cancer, according to pooled data from 24 studies involving 21,600 men with the disease.

Researchers at Meta-Analysis Research Group in Columbia, South Carolina, in the US said the study "provides good evidence that prostate cancer is likely a smoking-related tumour".

The findings, published in the American Journal of Public Health, revealed that both the chance of developing prostate cancer and dying from prostate cancer increases with smoking, even though many of the studies analysed used crude smoking classifications.

For example, the researchers calculated smoking status as ever versus never rather than by packs smoked per day, or did not define changes

in smoking or disease status over time in American, Norwegian, Japanese, Swedish, and British men with prostate cancer.

In eight studies that provided more in-depth number of cigarettes smoked per day in nearly 8,700 men, the team estimates 30 per cent greater risk of dying from prostate cancer in the heaviest smokers versus non-smokers.

Likewise, they estimated a 22 per cent greater chance for developing prostate cancer in the heaviest smokers, based on pooled information from four studies of about 2,100 men.

However, they noted, even these studies do not firmly establish an individual smoker's chance for developing or dying from prostate cancer when compared with their non-smoking counterparts.

They have suggested for additional research that quantifies how the number of packs and duration of smoking affects risk for

developing the disease and its progression. — Reuters

### Coffee may protect the heart

DRINKING four cups of coffee a day may protect the heart. Despite the belief that coffee can cause the heart to go into palpitations, a study indicates that moderate drinkers may be at a lower risk of having heart rhythm disturbances.

British researchers said the study did not conclusively prove coffee protects the heart — just that there was some sort of link. They noted that coffee drinking is related to lower risk of hospitalisation for rhythm problems, but the association does not prove cause and effect, or that coffee has a protective effect.

They believed moderate doses of caffeine may help the heart by blocking the action of the chemical adenosine, which can cause disturbed rhythm.

The study involved more than 130,000 men and

women. Those who drank four or more cups of coffee a day had an 18 per cent lower risk of going to hospital for heart disturbances. Those who drank between one and three cups had a seven per cent reduction of risk.

Other explanations may include separate traits of coffee drinkers. They may happen to do more exercise and have a better diet — but the study did not look at this.

The researchers said although the study did not provide sufficient evidence to say that people should drink coffee to prevent rhythm problems, it did show that people with rhythm problems — or who are at risk of them — do not need to abstain from coffee.

They said the data might be reassuring to people who drink moderate amounts of coffee that their habit is not likely to cause a major rhythm disturbance. — Daily Mail