

Research shows that apples, pears and bananas may reduce the risk of strokes

A major research study published in the Sept. 15/2011 issue of Stroke: Journal of the American Heart Association indicates that high levels of consumption of white-fleshed fruit and vegetables can protect people from strokes.

The study was conducted with more than 20,000 people between 20 and 63 in the Netherlands. The respondents filled out a questionnaire that tracked the frequency of their consumption of 178 food items. Over the following ten years, the number of first-ever incident strokes was tabulated. The data (adjusted for lifestyle and dietary factors), showed that for every 25 g increase in white fruit and vegetable consumption, there was a 9 % reduction in stroke risk.

While the link between high consumption of fruits and vegetables and reduced stroke risk is well-known, this was the first study to segment the fruits and vegetables by colour. There were four categories: green, orange/yellow (mainly citrus fruits), red/purple and white. The latter category included pears, apples, bananas, cauliflower, chicory and cucumber. Only this group was associated with stroke prevention although, of course, all fruits and vegetables have benefits for specific chronic diseases – not just strokes.

It is not clear what causes the linkage with stroke reduction but it is believed that it may be related to the presence of a flavonoid called quercetin that is particularly prevalent in apples and pears. Flavonoids are antioxidants and antioxidants have been proven to reduce the effects of aging – although this is a major over-simplification.

Stroke experts point out that, notwithstanding the size of the study, there are limitations that make the results less than definitive. Nevertheless, the insight about the value of white-fleshed fruit and vegetables vs. coloured fruits in stroke prevention is quite eye-opening. Certainly, it suggests that caregivers for those who are at greater risk of strokes would do well to add more than an apple a day to their diets.