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Research finds stroke spike among middle-aged women

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Strokes have tripled in recent years among middle-aged women in the U.S., an alarming trend doctors blame on the obesity epidemic.

Nearly 2 percent of women ages 35 to 54 reported suffering a stroke in the most recent federal health survey, from 1999 to 2004. Only about half a percent did in the previous survey, from 1988 to 1994.

The percentage is small because most strokes occur in older people. But the sudden spike in middle age and the reasons behind it are ominous, doctors said in research presented Wednesday at a conference.

Women's waistlines are nearly 2 inches bigger than they were a decade earlier, and that bulge corresponds with the increase in strokes, researchers said. No other risk factors changed enough between the two surveys to account for the increase in strokes.

anti-bleeding drug linked to death risk

Heart surgery patients were more likely to die if given the anti-bleeding drug Trasylol, two more U.S. studies have found, renewing the claims that the drug is dangerous.

Bayer AG stopped selling the drug last fall, after a Canadian study was halted because of deaths among patients taking Trasylol.

But the new research reignited controversy over Trasylol, which was on the market for 14 years and used by doctors to treat hundreds of thousands of heart bypass patients.

Bayer funded one of the two new studies, and had the preliminary results before a September 2006 federal hearing on the drug's safety -- but did not present them. The advisory panel voted to keep the drug on the market.

The company said that both the new studies, being published this week in the New England Journal of Medicine, are flawed.

PHASE OUT 'DIRTY BOMB' MATERIAL?

A research panel said Wednesday that the government should encourage replacement of cesium chloride for medical and research radiation because terrorists could use it in a "dirty bomb."

Cesium is used for radiation in hospitals and universities, the National Research Council noted. It could be replaced by other radiation sources, but they are more expensive, the council said.

SALTY FOOD LEADS TO OBESE KIDS, STUDY SAYS

Kids who load up on salty meals and snacks get thirsty, and too often they turn to calorie-filled sodas. So maybe cutting back on the salt is a good way to cut the calories.

That's the idea coming from a British study published Wednesday in an American Heart Association journal.

Salt is "a hidden factor in the obesity epidemic," said Graham MacGregor, a co-author of the study by researchers at St. George's University of London.

And researchers say about 80 percent comes from manufactured food.

Reducing salt in manufactured foods can be done gradually, without the public even noticing, said Dr. Feng He, lead author of the study and a research fellow at St. George's. She said a 10 to 20 percent reduction in salt isn't even detectable.

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