Smoking ups stroke in men and women

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SMOKING causes 72,000 strokes in Australia every year, and unlike heart disease, the risk of all-cause stroke in smokers is the same for men and women, Australian data shows.

The systematic review and meta-analysis of 81 prospective studies in four million patients showed women who smoked had a similar increased risk to male smokers, compared with non-smokers, giving a pooled relative risk ratio of 6% for overall stroke risk.

The international study led by Professor Rachel Huxley, an epidemiologist at the School of Population Health at the University of Queensland, said previous research showed there was a greater risk of heart disease in female smokers.

"Stroke, particularly ischaemic stroke, and heart disease have quite similar pathophysiologies. To be honest, we were expecting to see [a difference] and we were quite surprised.

"The message is that if you smoke like a man, you die like a man. You are at the same risk, and that is true of stroke as well," she said.

Professor Huxley said the study was large enough to uncover the link between smoking and haemorrhagic stroke, a less common and more fatal form of stroke. Smoking increased the risk in women by 17% compared with men.

She said the data highlighted the importance of measures to cut smoking rates in Australia.

Around 380,000 Australians had a stroke each year, she added.

"Just under 2% of the adult population has a stroke, either fatal or non-fatal, and we estimate that approximately 20% of all strokes are due to smoking."

The study showed that giving up smoking could cut stroke risk.

Women who gave up smoking had a 17% increased stroke risk, compared to those who never smoked.

In men, the risk of stroke among former smokers was 8%.

The benefit of quitting smoking on stroke risk was similar between the sexes.

Western women who smoked had a 10% increase stroke risk compared with men, a difference that was not observed in Asian populations, the study showed.

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