Evidence dietary potassium can help avert strokes

By ACSH Staff — March 2, 2011

A meta-analysis [1] of 11 studies undertaken by Italian researchers has concluded [2] that greater daily intake of potassium is associated with a substantially lower risk of stroke. An impressive 247,510 patients were included in the analysis.

Writing in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology, the researchers said that for every increase of 1.64 grams of potassium consumed daily, the incidence of stroke dropped by 21 percent. Other possible risk factors for stroke were controlled for including weight, frequency of exercise, general health and consumption of dietary fat. Somewhat surprisingly, the study authors noted that they found no relationship between potassium intake and heart disease risk.

Dietary potassium is obtained mainly from fruits and vegetables. A cup of raisins, for example, contains a little more than one gram of potassium (as well as almost 500 calories).

Included in the meta-analysis were studies based on patients’ dietary recall and more rigorous examinations that sampled study subjects’ 24-hour urinary potassium excretion to more precisely measure dietary intake. ACSH’s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan notes, however, that as this is a non-interventional analysis, the data cannot be used to support a cause-and-effect link between potassium intake and stroke. “It may just be an association. It is certainly one which warrants further evaluation with a prospective controlled study though,” she says.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross observes: “While this study is provocative, doctors advising patients need to avoid jumping to unreasonable conclusions. Certain types of patients have to be cautious about consuming more potassium. This is especially true of patients with diminished kidney function.”

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