# Minor Increased Stroke Risk for Postmenopausal Women on Antidepressants

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Postmenopausal women who take antidepressants might face a small increase in the risk of stroke and death, according to a study published online December 14 in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

The study involved 136,293 women enrolled in the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), a 15-year research program funded by the U.S. government to explore the most common causes of death, disability and poor quality of life in postmenopausal women. Though none of the women were taking an antidepressant upon entering the study, 5,496 were prescribed an antidepressant while participating in the study. The women included in the analysis were followed in WHI for an average of six years.

Antidepressants were not tied to coronary heart disease. There was, however, a 45 percent increase in the risk for stroke and a 32 percent increase in the risk of death from any cause. There were no differences in the risks of stroke or death between those taking selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and tricyclic antidepressants.

It is important to note that very few women in WHI had a stroke or died during the study period. The percentage increases reported in this study reflect a statistical method called relative risk. For example, the risk of a stroke is not 32 percent, but rather there is a 32 percent increase in the low overall risk of stroke in postmenopausal women using antidepressants.

The authors caution that the study could not conclude whether the increased stroke and mortality risk was solely a result of antidepressant use. Also, they stress that the small increased risk of stroke and death must be weighed against the significant decrease in quality of life and increased risk of cardiovascular disease in those women with untreated depression.

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