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GARRISON KEILLOR'S STROKE

MY ABOVE-AVERAGE STROKE

After a blood clot infiltrated his gray matter, the *Prairie Home Companion* host started thinking seriously about sex (and other important stuff)

By Garrison Keillor, Photographs by Steve Pyke, Posted Date: November 15, 2010

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The Young Man's Stroke

By Laura Roberson

Every 40 seconds, someone in the United States suffers a stroke. Every fourth victim is under age 65, every 14th not yet 45--and many of them never know what hit them until it's too late. Long-term health factors may be to blame, but brain explosions in young people could also have more immediate triggers.

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Intense Physical Activity

A mundane neck strain could turn deadly. "More men are staying active into their 40s and 50s--the age when arteries have begun to stiffen," says Patrick Lyden, M.D., chairman of the department of neurology at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. "Take a tumble on the court and stretch your neck, and it could cause a rupture of the arterial lining." This stroke-inducing condition, called carotid dissection, occurs most commonly in the fifth decade of life, and accounts for up to 25 percent of strokes in young and middle-aged patients, according to a French study. If you feel neck pain during exercise, you should take an aspirin immediately to prevent clotting, Dr. Lyden says. Then see a doctor.

Energy Drinks

You're pumped up, and so is your blood pressure. "Energy drinks and 'fat-burning' supplements can contain speedlike compounds similar to methamphetamine that constrict the brain arteries and can cause them to collapse," says Dr. Lyden. A recent Australian study found that just one 8-ounce can of a sugar-free energy drink may make blood vessels stiffer, and clot-forming cells stickier. If you need a boost, stick with coffee, which is a much safer option, Dr. Lyden says.

Massage

There's a small, vulnerable stretch of the carotid artery that lies between the base of your neck and the carotid bulb (the part you can feel pulsing). Massaged improperly, it can tear, or dissect, which may lead to stroke. The dangers: "pressure-point" massages, which zero in on a single spot, and electric massagers held in this region of the carotid artery, according to a study in the *Southern Medical Journal*. Keep the head of the electromassager moving and you should be in the clear, the scientists say.

Beauty Parlor Syndrome

Don't let the feminine name fool you: Cervical extension, which can occur when you lean back over the salon sink for a shampoo, isn't confined to the beauty shop. The neck-arching position can be replicated on a massage table, when you lie on your back with a towel beneath your neck, or during weighted neck-extension exercises, says Larry B. Goldstein, M.D., director of the Duke Stroke Center. The syndrome is extremely rare, but people with high stroke risk--smokers and people with high blood pressure, family history of stroke, prior stroke, diabetes, or high cholesterol--should avoid the position, the National Stroke Association advises.

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