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## Cardiac Risk for Depressed Young Women



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Moderately or severely depressed women aged 55 and younger have twice the risk of suffering a heart attack, dying of heart disease or requiring an artery-opening procedure compared to men and older women. The “hidden” risk factor of depression may contribute to the disproportionately high death rate following heart attack in young and middle-aged women. The new research has been published in the Journal of the American Heart Association.

### Depression and Heart Disease

Researchers from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia assessed symptoms of depression in people with known or possible heart disease who were scheduled for coronary angiography. The procedure is an X-ray that looks for disease in arteries involved in supplying blood to the heart. Of the 3,237 people followed during the study, 34 percent were women. The average patient was 62.5 years old.

After three years, symptoms of depression were not associated with the presence of cardiac disease in men or older women. However, women 55 years of age or younger had a seven percent increase of heart disease for every one percent increase in depression symptoms. This finding came after adjusting for other risk factors for heart disease. Importantly, young and middle-aged women are more likely than older women and men to suffer from depression.

### Higher Risk of Death in Depressed Women

The study also found that during the three-year follow-up, young and middle-aged women were 2.17 times as likely to experience a heart attack, to require an artery-opening procedure, or to die from heart disease if moderate-to-severe depression was present. Additionally, there was an increased risk (2.45 times) for depressed female patients in this age group to die from any cause during the follow-up period. “All people, and especially younger women, need to take depression very seriously,” said Amit Shah, MD, MSCR, a study author and assistant professor of epidemiology at Emory University.

### Call For Provider Intervention

Depression is health risk in itself, and a 2008 statement by the American Heart Association recommended that it be considered a risk factor for heart disease, along with diabetes and hypertension. The recent findings, that it is associated with heart disease and death in young women, should remind patients to seek help and encourage providers to question patients who may be more vulnerable to the condition.

Viola Vaccarino, MD, PhD, the study’s senior author, and Wilton Looney, the Chair of Epidemiology at Emory University, remarked: “Although the risks and benefits of routine screening are unclear, our study suggests that young women may benefit for special consideration...Unfortunately, this group has largely been understudied before.”

The study was funded by the National Institutes of Health and Emory Heart and Vascular Center. The research group is currently studying whether women who experience short-term stress, such as that which results from public speaking, have more cardiovascular changes compared to men.

### [Reference: American Heart Association](#)

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