
Heart attacks increasing among young adults



According to new research presented at the American College of Cardiology's 68th Annual Scientific Session, the rate of heart attacks in very young adults is steadily rising, despite an overall decline in the number of heart attacks in the U.S.

The study compared young (41-50 years old) to very young (40 or younger) heart attack survivors. A total of 2097 young patients were included in the analysis, out of which 20% were 40 or younger.

Findings show that 1 in 5 patients who suffer a heart attack at a young age is 40 or younger. Findings from the 16-year study also show that the proportion of very young people having a heart attack has been consistently increasing over the last 10 years (at about 2% each year).

"It used to be incredibly rare to see anyone under age 40 come in with a heart attack--and some of these people are now in their 20s and early 30s," said Ron Blankstein, MD, a preventive cardiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital, associate professor at Harvard Medical School in Boston and the study's senior author. "Based on what we are seeing, it seems that we are moving in the wrong direction."

It is unfortunate that young people who have heart attacks in their 40s have the same rate of outcomes as compared to older patients despite being 10 years younger on average. Prof. Blankstein explains that people who have a heart attack in their 20s or 30s are as much at risk for more cardiovascular events as patients who are older. He also highlights the need to understand why people are having heart attacks at such a young age.

The study researchers have tried to identify possible risk factors behind this increase. As per their analysis, traditional risk factors for heart attack, including diabetes, high blood pressure, smoking, family history of premature heart attack and high cholesterol, were similar between the two groups but the younger heart attack patients were also more likely to report substance abuse, including marijuana and cocaine.

The researchers also observed a trend towards less use of aspirin and statins among very young patients thus suggesting a bias in terms of clinicians believing that these patients might be at a lower risk of heart attacks because of their age. Prevention may thus be the key to reducing this increase. As Prof. Blankstein explains, the vast majority of heart attacks could be prevented with earlier detection and lifestyle changes and management of other risk factors. Regular exercise, smoking cessation, heart-healthy diet, and a healthy weight can help reduce the risk. People should also monitor and manage their blood pressure and cholesterol levels and avoid diabetes if possible. Also, staying away from cocaine and marijuana might also be good for the heart.

Source: [American College of Cardiology](#)

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