

Heart Attacks Victims Found to be Younger, Unhealthier

By ACSH Staff — March 28, 2016



[1] Heart attack via Shutterstock

Alarming new data suggests that heart attack victims today are unhealthier and much younger than in decades past. And while the likelihood of surviving a heart attack continues to improve, there's been a disturbing increase in unhealthy behaviors, as well as growing neglect of risk factors, that have led to this life-threatening event occurring at an earlier age.

The [Cleveland Clinic](#) [2] assessed approximately 4,000 patients who experienced a heart attack, or myocardial infarction, between 1995 and 2014. Researchers found that the cohort was more likely to exhibit greater cardiovascular disease risk factors including obesity, high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes as compared to the population as whole. And the average age of first-time attack victims dropped to age 60, from 64 two decades prior.

The data also showed an alarming increase in smoking rates for victims over the 20-year span — up to 46 percent, from 28 percent. Moreover, those who were identified to have three or more risk factors for a heart attack increased to 85 percent of those studied, up from 65 percent.

These findings will be presented at the [American College of Cardiology](#) [3]'s upcoming conference in Chicago on April 2.

The trend is particularly disturbing given the type of heart attack assessed. Specifically, researchers examined the STEMI heart attack, which stands for S-T elevation myocardial infarction. According to the [American Heart Association](#) [4], this type of acute coronary syndrome is the most life threatening and “happens as a result of a complete blockage in a coronary artery,” or the passage that carries blood to the heart. Victims typically suffer severe myocardial necrosis, or tissue death, and the odds of a second occurrence increase substantially.

“Risk factor reduction in the broader population has been documented, so it is concerning that, at this institution, risk seem to have risen over 20 years,” Dr. Mary Norine Walsh, vice president of the American College of Cardiology, [told CBS News](#). [5]

There are steps one can take to reduce risk, and prevent a heart attack from occurring in the first

place. They begin with awareness of risky behavior, which can be divided into two categories: non-modifiable and modifiable.

Non-modifiable risk factors are things we have no control over such as age, sex and family history. Modifiable risk factors are things over which we can exercise control, and need to in order to reduce the chances of experiencing a heart attack.

The [American College of Sports Medicine](#) [6], the world's leading organization on sports medicine and exercise science, recommends getting at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week, quitting smoking and eating a balanced diet "rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins and fiber." These modifications will positively affect blood pressure, cholesterol levels, reduce obesity and Type 2 diabetes risk — thus reducing one's overall risk of cardiovascular disease.

"Prevention must be kept in the forefront of primary care," said Dr. Samir Kapadia, the study's lead investigator in speaking with CBS News. "The primary care physicians and the patient need to take ownership of this problem."

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