

# Hey Heart Patients, Sex is Your Friend

By *Nicholas Staropoli* — September 21, 2015

*There's a widespread misconception that sex is a risk factor for heart attack. However, a new study finds that this is just another one of those pesky health myths that needs another round of debunking.*



The American College of Cardiologists has a message for

everyone, especially heart patients: It's OK to have sex.

Many believe that the exertion involved in sexual activity is a risk factor for heart attack. However, according to [one new study](#) <sup>[1]</sup> in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, this is statement that is not supported by data.

The researchers conducted surveys of 536 heart disease patients, aged 30 to 70, to gauge their sexual activity during three time periods. The first was for the 24 hours leading up to their heart attack; second, for the year prior to their heart attack; and lastly, for the 10 years following their heart attack. No period was associated with an increase in heart attack risk.

In the year prior to their heart attack, the study reported that 14.9 percent of patients reported no sexual activity; 4.7 percent said they had sex less than once per month; 25.4 percent reported less than once a week; and 55 percent reported having sex more than once a week during the period.

But in the 24 hours prior to cardiac arrest, less than one percent reported having sexual intercourse. Furthermore, in analyzing the 10 years post heart attack for these patients, there was no connection to sex activity.

According to the authors, sexual activity is not considered an overly stressful act on the cardiovascular system. They likened it to the same level of physical activity as ascending two flights of stairs or taking a brisk walk.

Dietrich Rothenbacher, M.D., M.P.H., Institute of Epidemiology and Medical Biometry at Ulm

University in Ulm, Germany, and lead author of the study, said "based on our data, it seems very unlikely that sexual activity is a relevant trigger of heart attack."

He also added that "less than half of men and less than a third of women are getting information about sexual activity after a heart attack from their doctors. It is important to reassure patients that they need not be worried and should resume their usual sexual activity."

The latter half of his quote highlights the importance of this study, since many myths exist about the connection between heart health and sexual activity. [One study published last year](#) [2] in *Circulation* found that more than 80 percent of heart attack patients did not have conversations about sexual intercourse with their doctors. This leaves patients to get this important information from less-informed sources, like the media.

For example, a few years back many news sources publicized a study that claimed sex was a risk factor for heart attacks. [CNN's headline read "Heart-attack risk spikes after sex, exercise"](#) [3] and the article began by reporting a three-fold increase in heart risk after having sex or working out. However, the risk increase was determined to be from one-in-a-million to three-in-a-million, making the entire piece essentially nonsensical.

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[1] <http://content.onlinejacc.org/article.aspx?articleID=2442717>

[2] <http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/early/2014/12/10/CIRCULATIONAHA.114.012709>

[3] <http://www.cnn.com/2011/HEALTH/03/22/health.risk.sex.workout/>