

# Offspring whose parents have long lives appear to have lower heart risks in middle age

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Individuals with one or more parents who survive to age 85 or older may have fewer risk factors for heart disease in middle age, according to a report in the March 12 issue of *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

Previous research has suggested that the children and siblings of centenarians, who live to age 100 or more, also have longer-than-average life expectancies, according to background information in the article. Individuals whose parents were centenarians also are less likely to have heart disease, hypertension and diabetes, and tend to develop these conditions at later ages than those whose parents died younger. This supports the idea that avoiding or delaying cardiovascular disease is helpful in surviving to a very old age, the authors note

Dellara F. Terry, M.D., M.P.H., of the Boston University School of Medicine, and colleagues studied 1,697 members of the Framingham Heart Study, a large, multigenerational study of risk factors for cardiovascular and other chronic diseases that began in 1948 among residents of Framingham, Mass. All of the individuals included in this analysis had parents who also participated in the study and either lived to be age 85 or older or died before Jan. 1, 2005. The participants were examined between 1971 and 1975, when they were all age 30 or older (average age 40 years). Information recorded included education level, smoking habits, blood pressure, blood cholesterol levels, body mass index and Framingham Risk Score, a combined measure of

cardiovascular disease risk. Between 1983 to 1987, 1,319 of the participants were examined again, so the researchers could analyze how these variables changed over time.

In the initial group of 1,697 offspring, 11 percent had two parents who survived to age 85 or older, 47 percent had one parent who lived to that age and 42 percent had two parents who died before age 85.

Framingham Risk Score was worst, on average, in individuals whose parents had both died before age 85 and best among those whose parents had both lived to 85 years or older. "The percentage of those individuals with optimal or normal blood pressure, total/high-density lipoprotein ["good"] cholesterol ratio, and low Framingham Risk Score was highest in those with both parents surviving to 85 years or older," the authors write. "The relations for body mass index were less clear; however, fewer obese individuals had both parents survive." Among those who participated in both study examinations, those whose parents lived longer had a lower risk of blood pressure and a slower progression of Framingham Risk Score over time.

"Our findings suggest that individuals with long-lived parents have more advantageous cardiovascular risk profiles in middle age compared with those whose parents died younger and that the risk factor advantage persists over time," the authors write. "There are well-established genetic contributions to each of the risk factors that we have examined that may partially explain the reduced risk factors for those with long-lived parents. Better understanding of genetic variation in cardiovascular risk factors and longevity eventually may be helpful for disease prevention and treatment strategies in the community."

Source: JAMA and Archives Journals

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