

Heart Attacks Occur More in the Morning, Experts Say

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The movies typically show heart attacks taking place over dinner or in the heat of an argument.

Although these scenarios are possible, that's not normally the case.

Imran Arif, MD, says studies show heart attacks are more likely to occur over the breakfast table or during your morning shower than any other time of day.

“Heart attacks occur more often between 6 a.m. and noon,” says the assistant professor of cardiovascular diseases at the University of Cincinnati. “No one truly knows why, but studies suggest increased sympathetic nervous system tone and elevated cortisol levels during this time can lead to the rupture of cholesterol plaques in coronary arteries ultimately leading to a four fold higher risk of heart attack early in the morning.”

Cortisol is a hormone produced by the adrenal gland. It is often referred to as the “stress hormone” as it is involved in response to stress.

“Many people are tense before going into work every day, either because of their job or because of their morning routines,” Arif says. “Stress can ultimately lead to heart attacks as well.”

He adds that after sleep, people's systems and heart rates speed up which could also lead to plaque rupture in the arteries.

Arif urges people to watch for the following warning signs:

- Chest discomfort
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach
- Tightness in the throat
- Shortness of breath
- Cold sweats
- Nausea
- Lightheadedness

“Call 911 or get to the nearest hospital if you experience signs of a heart attack,” Arif says.

But prevention is the best tactic.

“Know your risk factors, and pay close attention to your cardiovascular health every day,” he says, adding that exercise, a proper diet, management of cholesterol and blood pressure levels and avoiding smoking are keys to preventing heart disease. “A single heart attack can be fatal, no matter what time of day it occurs. Do your best to keep your heart healthy and beating for years to come.”

On the net: www.netwellness.org/healthtopics/heart/faq4.cfm

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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