

An angry heart can lead to sudden death, researchers find

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Before flying off the handle the next time someone cuts you off in traffic, consider the latest research from Yale School of Medicine researchers that links changes brought on by anger or other strong emotions to future arrhythmias and sudden cardiac arrests, which are blamed for 400,000 deaths annually.

The study—led by Rachel Lampert, M.D., associate professor of medicine at Yale School of Medicine, and published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*—deepens our understanding of how anger and other types of mental stress can trigger potentially lethal ventricular arrhythmias.

Lampert and her team studied 62 patients with implantable cardioverter-defibrillators (ICDs) and enlarged hearts. They were monitored three months after the ICD was implanted and then given a mental stress test requiring them to recall a stressful situation that angered them.

Lampert and her team sought to discover whether T-wave alternans (TWA), which monitor electrical instability in the heart induced by anger, would predict future ventricular arrhythmias. The team found that those in the group with more anger-induced electrical instability were more likely to experience arrhythmias one year after the study than those in the control group.

"Further studies are needed to determine whether there is a role for therapies which may reduce anger and the body's response to stress,

thereby preventing arrhythmias in those at risk," said Lampert.

Lampert's work builds on past research linking strong emotion to sudden cardiac death. It has been found that devastating disasters, such as earthquakes, are linked to sudden death.

More information: Journal of The American College of Cardiology, Vol. 53, No. 9 (March 3, 2009)

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