

Study Finds Lack of Social Support After Heart Attack Affects Women More Than Men

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Poor social support following heart attacks contributes to worsening health and symptoms of depression, particularly for women, reveals a new study led by the Yale School of Public Health.

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The research, published this week in *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*, followed 2,411 heart attack survivors at 19 centers in the United States, and measured the level of social support they received and

their health status over the first year of recovery.

The researchers asked participants whether they had someone available to listen, give good advice, and provide love and affection and other types of emotional support.

Patients with lower levels of support during recovery fared significantly worse than their peers who received regular and comprehensive support during recovery. Those with low support had an increased risk of angina, more [depressive symptoms](#), lower mental functioning and poorer heart-related quality of life.

This association was more pronounced in female patients. “We found that women with low social support were more likely than their peers to be single and have a history of smoking and high [cholesterol](#),” said senior author Judith H. Lichtman, Ph.D., associate professor in the Division of Chronic Disease Epidemiology. “Our results demonstrate that low social support is linked to important outcomes for patients not only during the early recovery period, but throughout the first year after a heart attack.”

Cardiovascular disease is the leading killer of American men and women. Earlier research has linked low social support with higher hospitalization and death rates after heart attack. But its association with other outcomes, such as symptoms of depression, has not been well studied.

“Interventions that increase social support may represent effective, non-invasive opportunities to improve health outcomes within the first year of recovery, particularly for women,” said lead author Erica Leifheit-Limson, a doctoral candidate in the Division of Chronic Disease Epidemiology.

“For survivors of heart attacks, we need to be concerned about aspects of their lives and recovery that are important to them beyond survival or having a recurrent [heart attack](#),” Leifheit-Limson said.

Provided by Yale University

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