

Cholesterol screening isn't just for the older crowd

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Cholesterol test

For 20-somethings, does scheduling an appointment for a well-exam or a cholesterol screening even register on your radar? A new study says that maybe it should.

For most, your early 20s are spent living on a diet of pizza and light beer in an apartment adorned with second-hand furniture.

Your thoughts are focused on getting to work—your first "real" job, no doubt—on time and figuring out how to spend your weekend.

Does scheduling an appointment for a well-exam or a cholesterol screening even register on your radar?

A new study in the July/August [Annals of Family Medicine](#) says that

maybe it should.

The study revealed that fewer than half of young adults get their cholesterol levels tested—a disturbing statistic considering two in three young adults have at least one risk factor for [coronary heart disease](#).

"There are some barriers keeping young people from getting cholesterol screenings when appropriate," says Kyle Kaufman, MD, primary care physician specializing in both pediatrics and adult care at UC Health West Chester.

In the study, researchers examined data on 2,587 young adults who participated in the National Health and [Nutrition Examination Survey](#) between 1999 and 2006. The men in the study were age 20 to 35; the women, 20 to 45.

Researchers found that the rate of elevated low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels ranged from 6.7 percent in participants with no increased risk of heart disease to 25.9 percent for those with two or more risk factors.

Cholesterol-screening rates increased with the number of risk factors present but remained low overall.

"Anyone over the age of 20 with heart disease, diabetes, vascular disease, [high blood pressure](#), or who smokes, is obese, or has a family history of heart disease at an early age should have their cholesterol checked annually," Kaufman says. "The results of this study show that more than 50 percent of these people are not screened."

Kaufman says that lack of medical care access or just a general "young and invincible" attitude could be reasons behind this statistic.

"People without health insurance are less likely to see their physician and therefore aren't screened," he says. "Young people are prone to this as they are in or just completing college or starting a career. This is a time when there is often a gap in health insurance coverage as they switch from their parents' plans to those offered through their employers.

"Also, young adults are more prone to only visiting the doctor when they are ill and may not come in for checkups," he continues. "Preventative care is not often done routinely when someone is in the office for an acute problem. Once in the office for a checkup visit, the onus is then on the doctor to adequately assess the need to do cholesterol screening, which may not be occurring as often as it should."

Kaufman says physicians should ramp up efforts to keep track of patients who should be screened and that patients should be educated on their risks in order to take their health into their own hands.

"Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the U.S.," he says. "A simple blood test can detect a health problem that can be readily treated. Other interventions such as exercise and healthy eating can prevent it from being a problem in the first place.

"Be your No. 1 advocate, and ask your doctor about cholesterol screening if he or she doesn't mention it. Schedule a well-exam at least yearly to keep your body healthy for years to come."

More information: To see the full study, visit www.annfammed.org/cgi/content/full/8/4/327

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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