

Study ties early menopause to heart attack, stroke

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Women who experience early menopause are more likely to have a heart attack or stroke than women whose menopause occurs at a later age, according to a new study by Melissa Wellons, M.D., assistant professor of Medicine in the Vanderbilt Division of Diabetes, Endocrinology and Metabolism.

Wellons conducted the research while working at the University of Alabama-Birmingham and it is published in the current issue of *Menopause: The Journal of The North American Menopause Society*.

She said the study is especially important because cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in U.S. women.

"My hope is that getting this message out will motivate women with early menopause to engage in the lifestyle and medical strategies known to reduce [risk of cardiovascular disease](#)—like controlling cholesterol, blood pressure and excess weight and by exercising," Wellons said.

The study looked at 2,509 women enrolled in the Multi-[Ethnic Study](#) of Atherosclerosis (MESA), with 693 reporting either surgical or natural early menopause before age 46. Women with early menopause were more often smokers, had diabetes and had a higher average BMI.

Within the study, early menopause in European, African-American, Hispanic and Asian women doubled the risk for cardiovascular disease when compared to groups experiencing menopause later in life.

"This is an observational study, so my colleagues and I can't conclude that [early menopause](#) is the cause of future cardiovascular disease," Wellons said.

"But our findings do support the use of age at menopause as a marker of future heart and vascular [disease risk](#). Clinicians should consider asking questions about menopause when collecting a female patient's medical history."

Provided by Vanderbilt University Medical Center

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