

NHS urged to screen stroke patients for silent heart disease to prevent thousands of deaths

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A new study has revealed that more than a third of stroke patients with no known history of heart disease have significant tightening of the arteries around their heart (coronary artery disease) and three percent will go on to suffer a heart attack within a year.

The research, led by Professor Pankaj Sharma at the Institute of Cardiovascular Research at Royal Holloway, University of London and Ashford and St Peter's Hospital, Surrey, reviewed data from 50,000 individuals to establish the risk of heart disease and [heart attack](#) in [stroke patients](#) with no medical history of heart problems.

The research, published in *BMJ Open* today (20 January), establishes that stroke patients are significantly at risk of [coronary artery disease](#) and heart attack even in the absence of symptoms associated with the disease. Those with silent heart disease do not experience any symptoms and therefore can remain undiagnosed, without access to treatment that can help manage the symptoms and reduce the future chance of a heart attack.

In the largest study of its kind, researchers found that one in three stroke patients have 50 percent coronary stenosis - meaning that plaque build-up is constricting the inner diameter of the artery by half, restricting the flow of blood and oxygen to the heart. In 3 percent of cases, patients will experience a heart attack within one year of their stroke – higher than previously thought.

The researchers recommend that following a stroke all patients should be assessed by cardiologists and screened for [silent heart disease](#) and this new protocol should be mandated by the NHS, something not routinely done in the UK.

Lead researcher Professor Pankaj Sharma from the Institute of Cardiovascular Research at Royal Holloway, said: "Following a stroke most stroke patients go on to die of heart disease rather than their stroke. Our research findings go a long way to explaining why this is the case. We are urging the NHS to screen all stroke patients for silent [heart disease](#) to prevent the deaths of thousands of patients each year."

More information: Quantifying the risk of heart disease following acute ischaemic stroke: a meta-analysis of over 50 000 participants. *BMJ Open* 2016;6:e009535 [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2015-009535](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2015-009535)

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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