

Heart attacks increasingly common in young adults

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3D Model of the heart by Dr. Matthew Bramlet. Credit: NIH

Even though fewer heart attacks are occurring in the U.S.—in large part due to the use of medications like statins and a decline in smoking—these events are steadily rising in very young adults. New data

not only validate this trend but also reveal that more heart attacks are striking those under age 40, according to research being presented at the American College of Cardiology's 68th Annual Scientific Session.

The study, which is the first to compare young (41-50 years old) to very young (40 or younger) [heart](#) attack survivors, found that among patients who suffer a heart attack at a [young age](#) overall, 1 in 5 is 40 or younger. Moreover, during the 16-year study period (2000 to 2016), the proportion of very young people having a heart attack has been increasing, rising by 2 percent each year for the last 10 years.

"It used to be incredibly rare to see anyone under age 40 come in with a heart attack—and some of these people are now in their 20s and early 30s," said Ron Blankstein, MD, a preventive cardiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital, associate professor at Harvard Medical School in Boston and the study's senior author. "Based on what we are seeing, it seems that we are moving in the wrong direction."

Also, despite being 10 years younger on average than those having heart attacks in their 40s, very young patients have the same rate of adverse outcomes, including dying from another heart attack, stroke or any other reason.

"Even if you're in your 20s or 30s, once you've had a heart attack, you're at risk for more cardiovascular events and you have just as much risk as someone who may be older than you," Blankstein said, explaining that young age isn't necessarily protective. "It's really important for us to understand why people are actually having heart attacks at a younger age, when there is even more productive life lost."

As part of their analyses, Blankstein and colleagues tried to identify possible risk factors behind the increase in heart attacks among younger adults. They said that traditional risk factors for heart attack, including

diabetes, [high blood pressure](#), smoking, family history of premature heart attack and high cholesterol, were similar between the two groups. However, the youngest patients were more likely to report [substance abuse](#), including marijuana and cocaine (17.9 percent vs. 9.3 percent, respectively), but had less alcohol use.

The study included a total of 2,097 young patients (

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