

# Risk of heart disease later in life for premature babies

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A new study led by researchers from the Royal Women's Hospital shows that young adults born extremely premature are susceptible to high blood pressure, putting them at higher risk of heart disease in later life.

More than 200 adults born in 1991 and 1992 have been tracked

throughout their lives as part of the Victorian Infant Collaborative Study. At the time of recruitment, these babies were either born at less than 28 weeks' gestation, had a birthweight under 1000 grams, or were normal birthweight.

Now aged 25, study participants who were born extremely premature were found to be almost twice as likely to have [high blood pressure](#) compared with those born at normal birthweight.

Dr. Anjali Haikerwal from the Women's is the lead author on the study published in *Hypertension* today and said this is an important insight into people born preterm, particularly the approximately 300 babies born in Victoria before 28 weeks' or below 1000 grams who survive every year.

"High blood pressure is the leading contributor to the global burden of heart disease. The findings of this study have important clinical implications for [health professionals](#), the families of premature babies, and for the individuals born preterm themselves as they enter adulthood," said Dr. Haikerwal.

"High blood pressure is definitely something that can be managed if it is detected in a timely manner. Health check-ups for adults born premature should include blood pressure measurements, and advocate for a [healthy lifestyle](#)—maintaining a healthy body weight and not smoking, for example.

"Survival rates of preterm babies in Victoria have gone from 10% in the 1970s to 75% in the late 1990s, thanks to significant steps forward in newborn medicine and technology. It is increasingly important to understand the long-term health outcomes into adulthood in this rapidly growing at-risk population."

The collaborative study involves researchers at the Women's, Mercy

Hospital for Women, Monash Medical Centre, and The Royal Children's Hospital. The [longitudinal study](#) hopes to continue to conduct assessments to track the health and wellbeing of children and adults born premature.

**More information:** Anjali Haikerwal et al. High Blood Pressure in Young Adult Survivors Born Extremely Preterm or Extremely Low Birthweight in the Post Surfactant Era, *Hypertension* (2019). [DOI: 10.1161/HYPERTENSIONAHA.119.13780](#)

Provided by Royal Women's Hospital

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