

Mummies study finds heart disease plagued the ancients, too

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Folks typically think of heart disease as a byproduct of modern fast-food living, but a new study shows the condition has plagued humanity for centuries. The findings were published May 28 in the [European Heart Journal](#).

More than a third (37%) of 237 adult mummies from seven different cultures spanning more than 4,000 years had evidence of clogged arteries, CT scans revealed.

Researchers say the results show that humans have an innate risk of atherosclerosis—a build-up of plaque in the arteries that can lead to [heart attack](#) and stroke.

"We found atherosclerosis in all time periods—dating before 2,500 BCE—in both men and women, in all seven cultures that were studied, and in both elites and non-elites," said lead researcher Dr. Randall Thompson, a cardiologist at Saint Luke's Mid America Heart Institute in Kansas City, Mo. "This further supports our previous observation that it is not just a modern condition caused by our modern lifestyles."

The mummies came from around the world, including ancient Egyptians, lowland ancient Peruvians, ancient highland Andean Bolivians, 19th century Aleutian Islander hunter-gatherers, 16th century Greenlandic Inuits, ancestral Puebloan, and Middle-Ages Gobi Desert pastoralists, researchers said.

Most cases were consistent with early [heart disease](#) that's often found on CT scans of modern patients, researchers said.

"This study indicates modern cardiovascular risk factors—such as smoking, [sedentary lifestyle](#) and [poor diet](#)—on top of the underlying,

inherent risk natural to the human aging process may increase the extent and impact of atherosclerosis," Thompson said in a Saint Luke's news release. "This is why it is all the more important to control the risk factors we can control."

More information: Randall C Thompson et al, Atherosclerosis in ancient mummified humans: the global HORUS study, *European Heart Journal* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/eurheartj/ehae283](https://doi.org/10.1093/eurheartj/ehae283)

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