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Healthy living adds 14 years to your life

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If you have optimal heart health in middle age, you may live up to 14 years longer, free of cardiovascular disease, than your peers who have two or more cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk factors, according to a new Northwestern Medicine study.

The study was published Nov. 5 in the Journal of the American Medical Association (*JAMA*).

"We found that many people develop cardiovascular disease as they live into old age, but those with optimal risk factor levels live disease-free longer," said John T. Wilkins, M.D., first author of the study. "We need to do everything we can to maintain optimal risk factors so that we reduce the chances of developing cardiovascular disease and increase the chances that we'll live longer and healthier."

Wilkins is an assistant professor in medicine, cardiology and preventive medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and a cardiologist at Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

For the study, researchers pulled data from five different cohorts included in the Cardiovascular Lifetime Risk Pooling Project and looked at the participants' risk of all forms of fatal and nonfatal cardiovascular disease from ages 45, 55 and 65 through 95 years of age.

All participants were free of CVD at entry into the study and data on the following risk factors was collected: blood pressure, total cholesterol, diabetes and smoking status. The primary outcome measure for the study

was any CVD event (including fatal and nonfatal coronary heart disease, all forms of stroke, congestive heart failure, and other CVD deaths).

Key results from the study:

- Individuals with optimal risk factor profiles lived up to 14 years longer free of total CVD than individuals with at least two risk factors.
- Men in middle age had lifetime risks of approximately 60 percent for developing cardiovascular disease.
- Women in middle age had lifetime risks of approximately 56 percent for developing cardiovascular disease.
- Lifetime risks for cardiovascular disease were strongly associated with risk factor burden in middle age.

Provided by Northwestern University

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