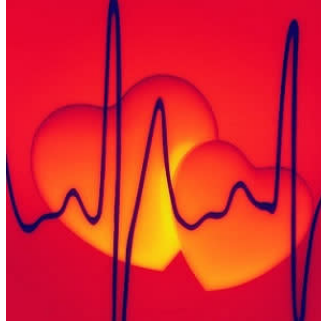


Depression increases risk for atrial fibrillation



Preliminary research indicates that depression may increase the risk for atrial fibrillation (AFib), the most common heart rhythm disorder that can lead to blood clot formation and stroke. The findings presented at the American Heart Association Scientific Sessions 2018 shed further light on the belief that mental health and heart health are closely intertwined.

Participants in the study who scored highest on a clinical screening test for depression as well as those taking anti-depressant medication had more than a 30 percent higher risk for developing AFib than people with normal test scores and those not taking medications for depression.

"Our findings identify a large portion of Americans who may be at an increased risk for developing atrial fibrillation and who may benefit from more targeted efforts to prevent this arrhythmia," said study lead investigator Parveen Garg, MD, MPH, assistant professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. "If our findings are affirmed in future studies, especially those that formally assess for clinical depression, then we will need to see if treating depression may, in fact, lower the risk for atrial fibrillation."

The findings stem from the national Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis (MESA) study, which involved more than 6,600 people from various ethnic groups. Participants, average age 62, had no known heart disease at the onset of the study and were followed for a median of 13 years.

How heart function is affected by depression remains unclear, according to researchers, although several possible mechanisms have been suggested. These include increased levels of inflammation as well as elevated levels of certain hormones that directly or indirectly interfere with the heart's ability to stay in a normal rhythm.

The new findings underscore previous research showing an association between depression and heart disease. As Dr. Garg noted, "Clinicians and patients should be aware that depression has been shown in several studies to be a risk factor for heart disease in general and, in this study, for atrial fibrillation as well." Treating depression is important for many reasons including cardiovascular health, the doctor added.

Data from the U.S. National Institutes of Health show more than 16 million adults in the country suffer from depression. Atrial fibrillation, meanwhile, affects some 2.7 million Americans, according to the American Heart Association's 2018 Heart and Stroke Statistical Update.

Source: [American Heart Association](#)
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Published on : Tue, 27 Mar 2018