

Does your height play a role in heart risks?

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Your height may affect your choice of clothing, theater seat or airplane row. Turns out it could also play a role in your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Scientists have looked at whether height increases or decreases risk of cardiovascular diseases for decades. In several cases they've found connections.

For instance, research suggests taller people suffer more from a type of irregular heartbeat called atrial fibrillation, as well as Marfan syndrome (a connective tissue and collagen disorder), which can come with heart valve problems and abnormalities of the aorta.

Being short also seems to come with risks.

A study from 2015 found that shorter people suffer [coronary artery disease](#) more often.

Meanwhile, a study in the American Heart Association's journal *Stroke* in February found that short children face increased risk for strokes as adults.

"Growth during this period of childhood is not significantly associated with either of these [stroke](#) subtypes, suggesting that underlying mechanisms linking height with risks of stroke may exert their influence already by early childhood," wrote the stroke study authors.

The research looked at data on more than 300,000 Danish schoolchildren born over nearly six decades. Researchers noted that boys and girls who were 2 to 3 inches shorter than average when they were between ages 7 and 13 were at increased risk during their adult years of clot-related, or ischemic, stroke in both sexes and of bleeding, or hemorrhagic, stroke in men.

Despite studies over many decades looking at height and health, there's still a lot unknown about how the two intersect. What is considered "short" or "tall" varies by study with consideration to the population and

gender being studied. There also is usually a midpoint height used based on the research.

In the stroke study, the average height at age 7 was about 4 feet for both boys and girls.

Many studies rely on patient memories. And the many environmental factors influencing human growth at all stages of development make it difficult for researchers to pinpoint what is exactly increasing the risk. Is it [height](#) or is it an environmental factor, such as nutrition, that made the difference?

In 2010, a meta-analysis of 52 studies involving more than 3 million men and women found that shorter people had a higher risk of having deadly [heart disease](#) than tall people. But even though the data crunching had that result, the studies were observational and therefore don't prove cause and effect.

Because the result was more dire for those of short stature, one expert warned people on the shorter side to "take coronary risk factor control more seriously."

But Dr. Jaakko Tuomilehto of the Department of Public Health at the University of Helsinki in Finland and author of the editorial "Tall is beautiful and [heart](#)-healthy?"—published in 2010 in *European Heart Journal*—didn't stop there. He suggests everyone model healthy behaviors.

"On the other hand, tall people are not protected against [coronary heart disease](#), and they also need to pay attention to the same risk factors as shorter [people](#)," he wrote.

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