

Link between panic attacks and heart disease discovered

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Vincent van Gogh's 1890 painting

People who suffer from panic disorder are almost twice as likely to develop heart disease later in life than those who do not, according to new research.

In research by the University of Adelaide in South Australia researchers reviewed 12 studies, involving more than 1 million people and approximately 58,000 coronary [heart disease](#) cases.

The review found panic disorder increased the risk of heart disease by up to 47 per cent and the risk of heart attack by 36 per cent.

Professor Gary Wittert, from the University of Adelaide's School of Medicine and Director of the Freemasons Foundation Centre for Men's Health, says while this study has found a clear association between panic disorder and coronary heart disease, the mechanisms remain uncertain.

"The link between [panic disorders](#) and heart disease remains controversial, partly due to overlapping symptoms such as [chest pain](#), heart palpitations and shortness of breath," says Professor Wittert, an author on the paper.

"Furthermore, we can't rule out the possibility that in some people, the symptoms of a panic disorder represent a misdiagnosed heart condition.

"From this review it is clear that more research is needed to examine the impact of panic attacks on a sufferer's heart," he says.

Professor John Beltrame, a cardiologist from the University of Adelaide's School of Medicine, says people who suffer from panic attacks and anxiety should monitor their heart health.

"This new data suggesting a link between panic disorders and [coronary heart disease](#), underscores the importance of these patients seeking medical attention for their [chest pain symptoms](#) and not merely attributing them to their [panic attacks](#)," says Professor Beltrame, an author on the paper.

"Furthermore if cardiac investigations reveal that the chest pain is due to an evolving heart attack, then early treatment may be lifesaving," he says.

University of Adelaide's Dr Phillip Tully, who is the recipient of a National Health and Medical Research Council fellowship, is the lead author of this research.

The research was published this month in the journal *Psychological Medicine*.

More information: "Panic disorder and incident coronary heart disease: a systematic review and meta-regression in 1 131 612 persons and 58 111 cardiac events" *Psychological Medicine* DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0033291715000963](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291715000963)

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