

Women who start periods early are at greater risk of cardiovascular problems

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Researchers from The University of Western Australia have conducted a study that has found young women who start having periods early and often have a high body mass index are more prone to cardiovascular problems later in life such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

More than 800 [young women](#) from the Western Australian Pregnancy Cohort (Raine) Study were part of the study published in *PLOS ONE*. The Raine Study is one of the largest cohorts in the world to follow a group of young adults from before they were born and throughout their life.

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in women in Western countries, and it has been suggested its origins start at an early age, which prompted the team's research.

Dr. Chi Le-Ha, lead author of the study and Research Fellow at the UWA Medical School said it was evident from the study that the early onset of periods in young women and a higher body mass index resulted in many participants displaying symptoms that could potentially lead to future

metabolic problems.

"The participants studied were aged between 17 and 20 years old and we collected data from them from 8 years of age to the present," Dr. Le-Ha said.

"The average age of study participants starting periods was 12.7 years old and we found that for each later year a participant started their period there was a .0.75 kg/m² reduction in their body mass index."

Dr. Le-Ha said it would be interesting to explore why there was a correlation between young women who are overweight having periods early and how this contributes to an increased cardiovascular risk.

UWA Professor Roger Hart, from the Division of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, a lead investigator in the study, said the research demonstrated the importance of young women maintaining a healthy weight early in life to protect them from a potential future of cardiovascular risk.

"What people should take away from this study is the importance of women's health from a young age and to seek general practitioner advice for girls who have periods at a younger age, to ensure they are getting adequate exercise and have a good diet," Professor Hart said.

"Starting periods at an early age should not be seen by itself as the cause of cardiovascular disorder in later life, it is more a reflection of higher body fat levels in childhood, which leads to an early age at starting periods, and hence this could be viewed as a potential 'wake-up call' to address long-term health.

"It is well-known that female puberty is occurring at earlier age than in years gone by, perhaps due to lifestyle or environmental influences, with the earlier onset linked to a broad range of adult chronic diseases later in adulthood.

"This study is ground-breaking because where most previous studies have relied on participants retrospectively recalling the age of their first period, this study collected data on these young [women](#) over their life-course, increasing the reliability of the information and findings."

More information: Chi Le-Ha et al. Age at menarche and childhood body mass index as predictors of cardio-metabolic risk in young adulthood: A prospective cohort study, *PLOS ONE* (2018). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0209355](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0209355)

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