

# One spouse with heart disease may double risk for other

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Individuals living with a spouse with heart disease were more than twice as likely to have heart disease themselves, according to a study being presented at the American College of Cardiology's 70th Annual Scientific Session.

Researchers surveyed more than 5,000 heterosexual couples over the age of 45 living in seven regions of China from 2014-2016. Participants provided information about their personal health history and that of their spouse, including details about risk factors such as body mass index and blood pressure; lifestyle factors such as physical activity, smoking and alcohol use; and socioeconomic factors. For the study, a history of [cardiovascular disease](#) was defined as experiencing a [heart attack](#) or stroke or having percutaneous coronary intervention or coronary artery bypass graft, which are procedures to open or bypass blocked arteries.

"We found that an individual's cardiovascular disease risk is associated with the [health status](#) and lifestyle of their wife or husband," said Chi Wang, MPH, a research fellow at Heart Health

Research Center in Beijing and the study's lead author. "In addition to sharing [lifestyle factors](#) and socioeconomic environment, our study suggests the stress of caring for a spouse with cardiovascular disease may contribute to increased cardiovascular risk."

Previous research in this area has pointed to increased risks among those caring for a spouse after a stroke. The new study has a larger study population than previous studies and more comprehensive information on health status, risk factors and lifestyle variables, according to researchers.

Because the data came from multiple regions of China representing a wide range of economic and cultural backgrounds, Wang said the results likely would be similar to trends in other middle-income countries around the world. She said the findings underscore the need for preventive care for [spouses](#) of individuals with cardiovascular disease.

"Family-centered health care plays an important role in chronic health care around the world," Wang said. "Our finding indicates caregivers' health should be monitored as well as that of their spouse in the community and primary care setting."

According to the findings, the relationship between a spouse's history of [heart disease](#) and a person's own risk was especially pronounced in men. Among men whose wives had [heart](#) disease, 28% had cardiovascular disease themselves, compared to 12.8% of men whose wives did not have heart disease. A man's likelihood of cardiovascular disease was highest if his wife had a history of stroke, obesity or smoking. The researchers said the prominent role of women in determining a family's diet could help explain the findings.

Among women whose husbands had heart disease, 21% had cardiovascular disease themselves, compared to just 9% of women whose

husbands did not have cardiovascular disease. A woman's likelihood of cardiovascular [disease](#) was highest if her husband had a history of stroke.

"The [health](#) status and risk factors of women, who are the drivers of lifestyle in a majority of families in different cultural backgrounds, seem to affect their husbands to a greater extent than husbands' [risk factors](#) affect wives," Wang said.

The researchers also examined diabetes trends but found that having a spouse with diabetes did not significantly increase a person's own diabetes risk. This finding could indicate that genetic factors and family history of diabetes are the dominant factor for diabetes risk, Wang said.

Provided by American College of Cardiology

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