



how do I know if I'm at risk for a **HEART ATTACK?**

A. Of course, smoking, obesity and genetics top the list of risk factors. But surprising new research shows that experiencing the following life events can up your risk, too *by* GINA ROBERTS-GREY

1. You came down with a common childhood virus.

Scary, but true: Between 70% and 80% of people with heart failure of unknown origin have also suffered a bout with Coxsackie B, a virus that often goes undiagnosed (symptoms can be as mild as a fever or an upset stomach) as children. Scientists believe this close cousin of the more familiar Coxsackie A—also known as hand, foot and mouth disease—causes subtle injury to a child's developing heart, reducing its ability to respond to stress later in life. This may increase

the risk of coronary artery disease, says Nicole Weinberg, M.D., a cardiologist at Providence Saint John's Health Center in California.

2. You didn't drink milk as a toddler.

For kids, cow juice does more than build healthy bones. New research from St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto suggests that children under age 6 who drink fewer than two cups of vitamin D-fortified cow's milk per day have higher triglycerides and "bad" cholesterol in childhood.

"That can have long-term negative effects on your heart," says pediatrician Jonathon L. Maguire, M.D., lead study author. (Drinking milk in adulthood may also protect against cardiovascular disease, but the research is still emerging.)

3. You delivered a baby before 37 weeks' gestation.

About one in 10 babies is born preterm (before 37 weeks) each year in the U.S. Of the women who experience giving birth this way, those who go into spontaneous preterm labor (rather than →

BOOST YOUR HEART HEALTH TODAY



TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR.

If any of these circumstances apply to you, alert your doc. She may pay closer attention to your other risks (like anxiety) and, depending on your age, may order special tests.

SLEEP WHEN YOU'RE TIRED.

New research suggests that going against your body clock (for example, rising early in the morning when you're a natural night owl) could increase your risk of heart disease. If you can, try to adjust your work schedule so you're awake when your body wants to be.



CAFFEINATE CAREFULLY.

Need a pick-me-up? Skip energy drinks. One 16-ounce can boost blood pressure and stress-hormone responses, finds a new study. Regular coffee-drinking (up to five cups per day!), on the other hand, is associated with improved cardiac health.



BE THANKFUL.

Those who kept a daily gratitude journal for two months (jotting down a few people or things for which they were grateful) had reduced inflammation and improved heart rhythms compared with people who didn't journal, per new research.

—Cory Stieg



being induced) are at about a twofold risk for heart disease, says a study in the *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology*. Doctors speculate that pregnancy may act as a “stress test” for the heart and that preterm labor, as well as preeclampsia, can be a sign of its failing that test. Post-pregnancy, the arteries often function normally enough for symptoms to disappear, which is why many women don't realize they still have a problem.

4. You've given birth to fewer than two or more than three kids.

When it comes to preventing a heart attack, giving birth two or three times seems to be the sweet spot. Any less or any more is associated with roughly double the risk of heart disease, per new research from UT Southwestern Medical Center. “One theory is that women who have gone through four or more deliveries may experience more changes in fat distribution around abdominal organs associated with pregnancy,” says Monika Sanghavi, M.D., lead study author. As for women who have had just one child or none at all, they may be more likely to have underlying fertility issues such as polycystic ovarian syndrome, which affects insulin and weight and has been linked to increased heart disease risk.

5. You've gone through a divorce.

A study from Duke Clinical Research Institute says women who experience a divorce have a 24% greater chance of heart attack than those whose marriages remain intact. And two or more divorces correlates with a 77% higher risk. “Because she has increased responsibilities at home and in life, a divorced woman might not have time for heart-healthy habits like exercising and cooking healthy meals. The loss of an emo-

tional support system can also lessen heart health,” explains Pamela Douglas, M.D., cardiologist and professor at the Duke Center for Women's Heart Care.

6. You took certain medication for chronic acid reflux.

We're specifically talking about a proton pump inhibitor (PPI), available over the counter (e.g., Nexium) and via prescription. These medications are highly effective, and for some patients they may be the best defense against heartburn. But keep in mind: A new analysis of 2.1 million heartburn sufferers reveals that those who had treated their reflux with this class of drugs for an extended period had a 16% to 21% higher rate of heart attack later in life. Scientists aren't sure why PPIs in particular affect the heart, but they suspect that the drugs may have some impact on the health of the lining of the arteries. The same study revealed that taking heartburn medications of another type, known as H2 blockers (e.g., Zantec, Tagamet), was not associated with increased cardiovascular risk.

7. You got terrible hot flashes.

Sweating. Flushing. Burning up. They are the telltale signs of a hot flash, and women who experience many of these symptoms daily have significantly thicker carotid-artery walls (an early sign of cardiovascular disease) compared with women who have few hot flashes or none, report recent studies from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. “We had originally thought of a hot flash as simply a hormonal issue,” says Suzanne Steinbaum, D.O., Director of Women's Heart Health at Northwell's Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City, “but it could really be one of the first signs of a problem with the lining of the arteries, which is the first step in the development of heart disease.” ♦