

A new study has found that people who have a healthy heart in middle age may have a life expectancy that's up to 14 years longer than people who have at least two risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

A Healthy Lifestyle Is Associated With a Longer Lifespan Free Of Cardiovascular Disease

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 600,000 people die from heart disease in the U.S. every year. Deaths from heart disease account for about 25% of all fatalities.

A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association analyzed the risk of developing all forms of cardiovascular disease in people older than 45. The Cardiovascular Lifetime Risk Pooling Project pooled data from five different National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute-funded community based studies that included 905,115 person-years of data from 1964 through 2008. Researchers looked at risk factors including blood pressure (BP), diabetes and total cholesterol (TC).

All participants were free of cardiovascular disease (CVD) at baseline. Main outcome measures included all forms of stroke, congestive heart failure, fatal and non-fatal coronary heart disease and all other CVD related deaths.

Results from this study show that overall, middle-aged men (at 45 years of age) had a 60 percent chance of developing cardiovascular disease during their lifetime, while women had a 56 percent chance of developing a heart condition within their lifetime. Men and women at ages 55 and 65 with at least one elevated risk factor (high BP or high TC; but no diabetes or smoking), one major risk factor, or at least two major risk factors (very high BP or receiving treatment; very high TC or receiving treatment; diabetes; or current smoking) had lifetime risk estimates that were higher than 50%. In men and women with optimal risk factor profiles with normal BP, TC, no smoking or diabetes, the lifetime risk estimate was 40% for men and 30% for women. Compared with participants with at least two major risk factors, the adults with optimal risk factor profile lived free of cardiovascular disease for up to 14 years longer.

Although lifetime risk estimates for total heart disease were still high at over 30% for all individuals, maintenance of optimal risk factor levels in middle age is associated with a significantly longer lifespan free of heart disease.

John T. Wilkins, MD et al. Lifetime Risk and Years Lived Free of Total Cardiovascular Disease. JAMA. 2012;308(17):1795-1801.