Don’t Believe the Movies! Sex Is Unlikely to Trigger Cardiac Arrest

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It’s common in television and film for an older man’s heart to stop during sexual intercourse. But sex rarely causes cardiac arrest, suggest new findings published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology and presented at the American Heart Association’s annual meeting, reports HealthDay News.

For the study, researchers examined risk factors for cardiac arrest as part of a 16-year study involving about a million people living in and around Portland, Oregon. According to data, of the more than 4,500 cases of cardiac arrest that occurred in the Portland metropolitan area between 2002 and 2015, only 34 were associated with sex—18 during the act and 15 immediately after—for a rate of only 0.7 percent.

In addition, scientists noted that men were more likely than women to suffer cardiac arrest as a result of sexual activity. (Two of the 34 people who experienced cardiac arrest were female.) Nevertheless, among men, researchers linked only 1 percent of all cardiac arrests to sex.

“Previously, we would say the risk is probably low, but we don’t know how low,” said Sumeet Chugh, MD, the medical director of the Heart Rhythm Center at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles and the study’s senior researcher. “Now we have data, and we can say to them the risk is very low.”

What’s more, results showed that folks who had a cardiac arrest during sex were twice as likely to survive (19 percent versus the average survival rate of 10 percent nationwide). This is likely because a sex partner may be able to perform lifesaving CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation).

But scientists also noted that only one third of those in the study who witnessed a person experiencing cardiac arrest attempted CPR, which prompted researchers to stress the need for public education on this first-aid technique.

A health expert not involved in the study also insisted that doctors inform their heart patients that many people resume sexual activity following a cardiac diagnosis to help alleviate their fears on the matter.

Click here to learn about how where you live can affect your chances of survival following cardiac arrest.

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