Could Gray Hair Help Predict Heart Disease Risk in Men?

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Going gray? You could be at an increased risk of heart disease, according to new research presented at the European Society of Cardiology's EuroPrevent 2017 conference. Specifically, findings showed that gray hair was an independent risk factor for coronary artery disease in men — irrespective of many factors, including chronological age, ScienceDaily reports.

Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the most common type of heart disease and the leading cause of death in the United States among men and women. CAD occurs when the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle harden and narrow when cholesterol, plaque and other materials accumulate on their inner walls (a related condition known as atherosclerosis). This can trigger chest pain or a heart attack; over time it can weaken the heart muscle and contribute to cardiovascular failure or irregular heartbeats, called arrhythmias.

For the study, scientists followed 545 adult men who underwent testing for suspected coronary artery disease. Researchers divided patients into subgroups according to their diagnosis and the amount of gray or white hair on their heads at the time of the study. Additionally, scientists collected data from the men about an array of other cardiovascular risk factors, including hypertension, diabetes, smoking, high cholesterol and a family history of heart disease.

Findings showed that a having a plentiful amount of snowy hair was associated with an increased risk for coronary artery disease — independent of individuals' cardiovascular risk factors and age. Researchers also noted a statistically significant higher hair whitening score and more evidence of artery calcification among patients with CAD compared with their healthy counterparts.

"Atherosclerosis and hair graying occur through similar biological pathways and the incidence of both increases with age," said Irini Samuel, MD, a cardiologist at Egypt's Cairo University. "Our findings suggest that irrespective of chronological age, hair graying indicates biological age and could be a warning sign of increased cardiovascular risk."

Study authors suggested that a scoring system for the evaluation of silvered strands might some day be used as a tool to predict heart disease. But further research is needed to learn more about the genetic and environmental risk factors associated with strands losing their color.

Researchers also want to expand their studies to determine whether the link exists in women as

well.

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