Obesity and Other Factors May Put Youngsters at Greater Risk of Sudden Cardiac Arrest

Screening kids early for signs of heart disease is key to reducing unexpected deaths.

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Young people who suffer from obesity and high blood pressure, among other risk factors for cardiovascular disease, are more likely to experience sudden cardiac arrest—a condition in which the heart suddenly and unexpectedly stops, usually resulting in death—suggest new findings published in the journal Circulation, reports Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

For the study, researchers at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles assessed about 3,800 cases of sudden cardiac arrest deaths among patients ages 5 to 34 in Oregon spanning a period of more than 10 years. (Although recent cases involving sports have garnered much media attention, only a small percentage of deaths were associated with such activity.)

Instead, scientists found heart disease factors such as obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and smoking in almost 60 percent of the patients studied. Researchers believe these findings highlight the need to screen kids and young adults earlier in life for these signs of cardiovascular illness.

“The added benefit of such screenings is that early efforts to reduce cardiovascular risk are known to translate into reduction of adult cardiovascular disease,” said Sumeet Chugh, MD, the associate director of the Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute and the study’s lead researcher.

Furthermore, Chugh suggested that doctors focus on efforts to prevent heart disease during their routine medical visits.

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