Hep C and Heart Disease Link

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People with hepatitis C virus (HCV) have higher rates of cardiovascular disease (CVD) and death from it than HCV-negative individuals with similar risk factors. To reach this conclusion, Italian researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 22 large studies.

The investigators found that, compared with those who don't have the virus, people with hep C are 65 percent more likely to die from CVD, are more than twice as likely to have carotid artery plaques and have a 30 percent increased risk of a CVD "event," such as a stroke.

The researchers concluded that, even after considering major heart disease risk factors including diabetes, high blood pressure and smoking, people with hep C have a greater risk of CVD. This is particularly true among those with diabetes and high blood pressure.

"Additional studies are needed to determine the causes for increased CVD risk in patients with hep C," says Wendy Post, MD, professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins University, who researches cardiovascular and genetic epidemiology and who was not involved in this study. In the meantime, she says, "Strategies for decreasing risk include smoking cessation, exercise, weight loss if overweight, control of hypertension and diabetes, and treatment with statin medications."

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