

# Childhood depression may increase risk of heart disease by teen years

January 30 2014, by Adam Freeman

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Previous research could not determine how early in life the association between depression, heart disease could be detected

Children with depression are more likely to be obese, smoke and be inactive, and can show the effects of heart disease as early as their teen years, according to a newly published study by University of South Florida Associate Professor of Psychology Jonathan Rottenberg.

The research, by Rottenberg and his colleagues at Washington University and the University of Pittsburgh, suggests that depression may increase the risk of heart problems later in life.

The researchers also observed higher rates of heart disease in the parents of adolescents that had been depressed as children.

"Given that the parents in this sample were relatively young, we were quite surprised to find that the parents of the affected adolescents were reporting a history of heart attacks and other serious events," Rottenberg explained.

Cardiologists and [mental health professionals](#) have long known a link exists between depression and heart disease. Depressed adults are more likely to suffer a heart attack, and if they do have a [heart attack](#), it's more likely to be fatal.

However it was unclear when the association between [clinical depression](#) and cardiac risk develops, or how early in life the association can be detected.

These findings suggest improved prevention and treatment of [childhood depression](#) could reduce adult cardiovascular disease.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women - accounting for one in every four deaths in the United States every year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Rottenberg's research is published online in *Psychosomatic Medicine* and will be included in the medical journal's February 2014 issue.

During the study, Rottenberg and his colleagues followed up on Hungarian children who had participated in a 2004 study of the genetics

of depression.

The researchers compared [heart disease risk](#) factors - such as smoking, obesity, physical activity level, and parental history- across three categories of adolescents. The investigators surveyed more than 200 children with a history of clinical depression, as well as about 200 of their siblings who have never suffered from depression. They also gathered information from more than 150 unrelated children of the same age and gender with no history of depression.

Rottenberg plans to conduct additional research in order to understand why depression early in life may put people at increased risk for cardiovascular disease. Further studies planned with the Hungarian group will also examine whether any early warning signs of [heart disease](#) are present as these adolescents move into young adulthood.

Rottenberg is a leading researcher in the area of emotion and psychopathology, where he has focused on major [depression](#). His previous work covering on the causes and consequences of crying has received national and international media coverage. He's also the author of the forthcoming book, "The Depths: The Evolutionary Origins of the Depression Epidemic."

**More information:** Paper: [www.psychosomaticmedicine.org/ ...0000000028.abstract](http://www.psychosomaticmedicine.org/...0000000028.abstract) ([PDF article](#))

Provided by University of South Florida

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