

# Many young Americans don't realize heart attacks can hit them too: Poll

February 1 2023, by Cara Murez

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Dave Conway had a heart attack in 2018. He was only 30.

The Clintonville, Ohio, resident had been experiencing fatigue and shortness of breath, finally going to the emergency room with what he thought was pneumonia. Instead, he learned he'd had a "widowmaker" [heart attack](#) and a 100% blockage in a major artery.

"I thought people who had heart attacks or heart disease were [older people](#) who drink and smoke a lot and weigh much more than I did," Conway said.

"Recovery has been really tough, but I'm willing to do whatever my doctors tell me is needed to keep my heart safe in the future," he said in an Ohio State University news release.

Stories like Conway's are becoming more common, with studies showing heart attacks and stroke are on the rise among Americans younger than 40.

Certain [healthy habits](#) can help prevent [heart problems](#)—but getting younger adults to accept their risks remains an obstacle.

"It is alarming that [younger people](#) don't feel that they're at risk for heart disease, but it's not surprising," said Dr. Laxmi Mehta, director of preventative cardiology and women's cardiovascular health at the Ohio State Wexner Medical Center.

"Most young people think heart disease only happens in old people, but that's not the case," Mehta said in the release.

The [medical center](#) surveyed 2,000 Americans, finding that nearly half of those under age 45 believed they were not at risk for [heart disease](#).

Conway himself waited days after symptoms to start seeking treatment, which is not uncommon. The survey found about 32% of Americans

aren't confident they would know if they were having a heart attack.

"If something suddenly seems new and it doesn't make sense to you, seek medical attention. Don't Google it to figure it out. Don't ask somebody else. Let health care professionals decide if you're having a heart attack or not," Mehta said. "When it comes to a heart attack or stroke, every second counts. In fact, you shouldn't even drive yourself to the hospital. Call an ambulance so lifesaving care can begin right away."

To preserve your heart health, Mehta recommends following the American Heart Association's Life's Essential 8. This includes knowing your numbers for weight, [blood pressure](#), cholesterol and blood sugar. Also important are good lifestyle habits like eating a [healthy diet](#), quitting smoking and vaping, sleeping at least seven hours per night and getting 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise each week.

Also, see your primary care physician every year to stay ahead of any developing issues.

"Your doctor will screen for warning signs like high blood pressure and do blood work to track your cholesterol, so any changes over time can be flagged," Mehta said. "They will also assess your risk for diabetes and screen for certain cancers and other diseases that put your future wellness at risk."

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [heart attack](#).

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