

New study finds coronary arterial calcium scans help detect overall death risk in the elderly

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Measuring calcium deposits in the heart's arteries can help predict overall death risk in American adults, even when they are elderly, according to a new study published in the July issue of *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*.

Matthew J. Budoff, M.D., one of the study's authors and a researcher at the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center (LA BioMed), said previous studies had found measuring coronary arterial calcium with computed tomography (CT) heart scans could predict overall death risks in most American adults.

He said the latest study is the first extensive examination of coronary arterial scans of the elderly.

"This study indicates calcium scans can be the best predictor currently available to detect who is likely to suffer a heart attack and who is not," said Dr. Budoff. "Previous studies found coronary arterial calcium scans were effective tools for determining the overall death risk in young adults, diabetics, smokers and those suffering from renal failure. This study indicates coronary arterial scans are effective in measuring overall death risk in the elderly."

A calcium scan looks for calcification – or a hardening of the arteries caused by high blood fats and calcium deposits – in the arteries leading to and from the heart. These calcifications can block blood vessels and cause heart attacks, strokes or other health issues.

Researchers studied 35,383 adults, aged 40 to 80, in Torrance, CA and Nashville, TN, for an average of 5.8 years after having a coronary artery calcium scan. Among these research volunteers, 3,570 were age 70 or older.

In total, 838 deaths were recorded, 320 in women and 518 in men. The study found the overall death risk was higher among those with higher coronary arterial calcium scores.

"This study provides additional validation of coronary calcium studies," said Dr. Budoff. "Coronary arterial calcium scans can be very useful tools in assessing a patient's overall death risk. With this information, physicians can advise patients on diet, medications, exercise and other lifestyle changes that will help them avoid the risk of heart attack, strokes and other health problems."

Source: Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute at Harbor

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