

People with more fast food outlets near their home more likely to develop heart disease

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People with more fast food outlets near their home are more likely to develop heart disease, according to research published today in the *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology*, a European Society of Cardiology (ESC) journal.

Dr. Maartje Poelman, study author and assistant professor at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, said: "The number of fast [food](#) outlets has been increasing over the past several decades, selling food that is high in salt, saturated fat, refined carbohydrates, and calories. These types of foods are associated with [cardiovascular disease](#)."

The study, which was conducted in the Global Geo Health Data Centre at Utrecht University, examined whether individuals living close to a higher number of fast food outlets also have a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

The study included 2,472,004 adults aged 35 years and older who did not have cardiovascular disease on 1 January 2009 and had been living at the same address for at least 15 years. Participants were followed for one year for the

incidence of cardiovascular disease. The researchers counted the number of fast food outlets that could be reached by road within 500 m, 1 km, and 3 km of each participant's home.

The researchers found that the incidence of cardiovascular disease, particularly coronary heart disease, was significantly higher in [urban residents](#) who had one or more fast food outlets within 500 m of their home compared to none. For example, individuals had an approximately 13% greater risk of developing coronary heart disease in 2009 if they lived within 500 m of two fast food outlets compared to none.

The incidence of cardiovascular disease, particularly coronary heart disease, was also significantly increased for urban residents living within 1 km of two or more fast food outlets compared to none. For example, individuals had a roughly 17% greater risk of developing coronary heart disease in 2009 if they lived within 1 km of five or more fast food outlets compared to none.

The associations were less pronounced for 3 km zones, [rural areas](#), and incidence of stroke or heart failure.

Dr. Poelman said: "We know from previous research that the type of food available to purchase where people live influences their food choices. Our study suggests that city dwellers living within 1 km of fast food outlets eat more fast food, which increases their risk of [coronary heart disease](#). In our next series of studies, we will further examine this assumption."

"The weak association in rural areas could be due to the lower density of fast food outlets compared to urban areas," she noted. "It may also be related to the way people behave in rural areas, for example using the car more often and being less reliant on the residential area."

The authors state that "public policy makers should be aware of the likely impact of urban fast food outlet density on health, especially since the number of fast food outlets is still increasing". European guidelines on the prevention of cardiovascular disease, of which the ESC is a co-author, recommend that regulation of the location and density of fast food outlets should be considered.

Dr. Poelman said: "Policies are starting to reflect the influence of the food environment on health. The Mayor of London, for instance, has proposed banning new hot food takeaways around schools."

She continued: "We need to create healthier environments to prevent [heart disease](#) and banning fast food outlets, or regulating a maximum number, is one piece of the puzzle. Other elements include improving the availability of fresh and [healthy food](#) to buy. We can stimulate people to buy healthy food if we create an environment where it is the default choice."

Provided by European Society of Cardiology

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