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Study Finds Common Bacteria Linked to Potential Dangerous Heart Problem

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Study finds that a common bacteria known as to cause ulcers may now also be responsible for irregular heart rhythm, known as atrial fibrillation (AF).

Dr. Annibale Montenero, lead researcher and chairman of Multimedita General Hospital's Cardiology Department and Arrhythmia Center, has discovered a strong link between the bacteria helicobacter pylori and an increased risk of developing atrial fibrillation.

What is Atrial Fibrillation?

Atrial fibrillation is a heart disorder affecting about 2.2 million Americans, according to the American Heart Association.

Atrial fibrillation/flutter is a disorder of the heart's rhythm. In atrial fibrillation, the heart's two upper chambers (the atria) quiver or flutter instead of beating effectively. Unfortunately, the blood isn't pumped out completely. This has the potential to cause the blood to pool and clot.

Is Atrial Fibrillation Dangerous?

If a blood clot in the atria leaves the heart and becomes lodged in an artery in the brain, a stroke results. About 15 percent of strokes occur in people with atrial fibrillation.

Symptoms of Atrial Fibrillation:

- Sensation of feeling heart beat (palpitations)
- Pulse may feel rapid, racing, pounding, fluttering, or it can feel too slow
- Pulse may feel regular or irregular
- Dizziness, light-headedness
- Fainting
- Confusion
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Breathing difficulty, lying down
- Sensation of tightness in the chest

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How the Study was Conducted

59 patients suffering from persistent atrial fibrillation were administered a series of tests including a test to measure the levels of C-reactive protein in the blood and a test for H. pylori.

The results of these tests were then compared with results from the control group, which included 45 healthy people.

In addition to having C-reactive protein levels roughly 5 times higher than the control group, researchers found AF patients were also shown to be 20 times more likely to show levels of H. pylori.

In the overall analysis, 97.2 percent of atrial fibrillation patients were positive for H. pylori compared with just 5.3 percent of controls.

Investigators note that the link between H. pylori and atrial fibrillation is "highly significant."

Based on the findings, physicians are advised to check their AF patients for H. pylori and eliminate it whenever it is found.

References

Montenero AS, Mollicelli N, Zumbo F, Antonelli A, Dolci A, Barberis M, Sirolla C, Staine T, Fiocca L, Bruno N, O'Connor S. Helicobacter pylori and atrial fibrillation: a possible pathogenic link. *Heart*. 2005 Jul;91(7):960-1.

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