

Study Reveals Hidden Nighttime Heart Danger

Nearly half of the patients who undergo angioplasty, which often includes implantation of a stent, develop sleep apnea, a dangerous condition linked to heart attack and sudden death, a new study shows.

"Sleep apnea is a very dangerous condition and this study shows how widespread a problem it is among heart patients," Chauncey Crandall, M.D., tells *Newsmax Health*.

About one million Americans undergo angioplasty/stenting procedures each year to widen coronary arteries narrowed by heart disease. The new research found that 45 percent of these patients suffer from obstructive sleep apnea, and 22 percent had severe apnea.

Sleep apnea is a chronic condition in which the sleeper momentarily stops breathing. This can occur hundreds of times a night, and disrupts restful sleep, leading to poor sleep and excessive daytime sleepiness. The condition is often characterized by loud snoring.

Untreated sleep apnea can lead to high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, heart attack, stroke, diabetes, and obesity.

"Sleep apnea is at epidemic proportions," said Dr. Crandall, author of the ***Heart Health Report***. "This study shows that all heart patients should be screened for sleep apnea."

The study involved 1,305 patients who underwent successful angioplasty procedures for heart attack or chest pain. They underwent overnight sleep studies to check for sleep apnea.

"Our findings, in a large, multicenter sample of patients,

reinforce the known association between OSA [obstructive sleep apnea] and cardiovascular disease,” said study author Luciano Drager, M.D., of the University of São Paulo School of Medicine.

The research was presented at the 2015 American Thoracic Society International Conference in Denver.

The study found that sleep apnea was more common in heart disease patients than previously thought, said Dr. Drager.

“Sleep apnea is becoming more prominent because more people are obese and they develop it because their airways are obstructed,” said Dr. Crandall.

“People with sleep apnea also commonly have high cholesterol, high triglycerides, and they are inactive. So by the time they develop sleep apnea, they are also on the road to developing heart disease.”

Screening for sleep apnea usually requires an overnight stay at a sleep center. The standard treatment is a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) mask worn while sleeping that keeps airways open.

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