

## Adult Psoriasis Is Connected To Higher Risk of Heart Attacks

By PATRICIA KOWSMANN

Adults with psoriasis, especially younger patients with the severe form of the disease, appear to have higher risk for heart attacks, according to a study being published in today's issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Psoriasis is an inflammatory disorder characterized by raised, red lesions, or plaques, that can cause physical pain. Experts believe the disease, which affects about 2% to 3% of the adult population world-wide, is caused by the body's immune system attacking the skin.

The study, conducted by a team from the University of Pennsylvania, included 127,139 patients with mild psoriasis, 3,837 with the severe form of the disease and 556,995 corresponding control patients. The patients, ages 20 to 90 years old, were living in the United Kingdom and were followed for a mean of 5.4 years. Adjustments were made for hypertension, diabetes, history of heart attack, age, sex, smoking and body mass index.

The researchers found that the incidence of heart attack was 5.13 per 1,000 patients with severe psoriasis per year, 4.04 per 1,000 patients with mild psoriasis, and 3.58 per 1,000 people in the control group.

"The simplest way we can summarize [the findings] is that someone in their 40s and 50s with severe psoriasis has between one in 400 and one in 600 chance per year of having a heart attack related to that psoriasis, above and beyond the normal risk of having a heart attack," said Joel M. Gelfand, one of the study's authors.

Although the increased risk was similar in men and women, the study found age to make a difference, with patients who were younger and had severe psoriasis having a higher risk for heart attack.

For a 30-year-old patient with mild or severe psoriasis, the risk of having a heart attack is 1.29 per 1,000 patients and 3.10 per 1,000 patients, respectively. For example, a 30-year-old patient with a mild form of the skin condition had a 29% greater risk of having a heart attack than a patient without psoriasis. A 30-year-old with severe psoriasis had about three times the risk, while a 60-year-old patient with the severe form of the condition had a 36% increased risk.

"The magnitude of association between severe psoriasis and myocardial infarction in those patients younger than 50 years is similar to the magnitude of association for other major cardiac-risk factors," the authors concluded in the report.

"The risk of MI associated with psoriasis is greatest in young patients with severe psoriasis, is attenuated with age, and remains increased even after controlling for traditional cardiovascular risk factors," they added.

Liz Horn, director of research at the National Psoriasis Foundation, said the new study is "quite important" because it shows that there is an independent risk of heart attack in people with the chronic condition.

"Psoriasis is a disease that is really misunderstood," she said. "People think it is just a skin disease and they don't understand that it is actually a disease of the immune system. This study is very exciting because it gives more evidence for psoriasis as being a serious disease."

Dr. Horn, however, said it is still too early to discuss what the results mean for patients and doctors.

"It is important that patients talk to their doctors if they are concerned that they have a cardiovascular risk factor...but we don't want to scare them. This data is very important, it is very new, and because it is so new we don't know exactly what it means for the patients."

