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# Broken heart boosts risk of cardiac attacks: study

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A woman cries. Grief over the death of a loved one can cause a huge spike i...

Grief over the death of a loved one can cause a huge spike in a person's risk of heart attack, especially in the early days after the loss, said a US study on Monday.

The research tracked nearly 2,000 adults who survived a heart attack and found that among those who had just lost a loved one, the risk of a heart attack soared 21 times higher than normal in the first day.

The risk rate remained six times higher than normal through the first week, and declined slowly over the course of the first month, said the findings in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*.

Intense grief can cause a host of symptoms that raise heart risks, including higher heart rate, blood pressure, stress hormone levels and blood clotting.

Grieving people are also prone to lose sleep, miss medications and eat less, which can also boost cardiovascular risks.

"Friends and family of bereaved people should provide close support to help prevent such incidents, especially near the beginning of the grieving process," said Elizabeth Mostofsky, lead author of the research.

Previous studies have shown that grieving spouses have a higher risk of dying over the long term, with heart disease and strokes accounting for up to 53 percent of deaths.

The latest study is believed to be the first to examine the short term risk of heart attack after a loved one's death.

Researchers at Harvard Medical School's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and School of Public Health's epidemiology department in Boston, Massachusetts arrived at the estimates by reviewing charts and patient interviews after a heart attack from 1989 to 1994.

Patients answered questions about their personal lives, whether they recently lost someone significant in the past year, when the death happened and the importance of their relationship.

Researchers came up with the relative risk of a heart attack by comparing the number of patients who had someone close to them die in the week before their heart attack to the number of deaths of significant people in their lives from one to six months before their heart attack.

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