

- Heart attack

Heart of the matter

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HEART attacks are on the rise among young adults, and it's becoming alarmingly apparent that heart disease is not only a concern for the elderly. Here's a troubling fact to highlight the problem: Having a heart attack in your 20s or early 30s is more common, and 1 in 5 heart attack patients are under 40 years of age.



Additionally, a study on coronary artery disease (CAD) among Malaysian youth found that almost 70% of participants aged 15–24 have at least one cardiovascular risk factor. The common misconception that “heart attacks only happen when you're old” no longer applies, and young adults need to take immediate action.

Dr Nabil Haji Idris, Resident Consultant Cardiologist at Aurelius Hospital Nilai, said: “Heart disease does not discriminate based on age – it can affect anyone and everyone regardless of how young or old you are. Hypertension, diabetes, and high cholesterol are major contributing factors to heart disease, and we're seeing an increasing number of young adults experiencing this. Even in your 20s, it is so important to have regular health check-ups and maintain a healthy lifestyle to mitigate these risk factors.”

Let's look at some common misconceptions about heart disease risk factors among young adults: Can eat whatever I want, whenever I want, while I'm young?

We all love a good late-night mamak session, but perhaps you should think twice before ordering that Maggi goreng. An unhealthy diet high in fat will build up plaque in your arteries and increase your risk of a heart attack. Try swapping your usual teh tarik for a teh C kosong instead.

I'm still young, I can smoke and drink as much as I like?

Smoking is a strong risk factor for congestive heart failure because it causes atherosclerosis and raises blood pressure. Alcohol consumed in excess over several years can produce alcoholic cardiomyopathy, where alcohol acts as a toxin to weaken the heart muscle directly. Time to kick those bad habits!

Young people can handle stress well, so it's no big deal?

Whether physical or emotional, constant stress increases the likelihood of developing heart and circulatory disease. Studies have found that when you are stressed, your amygdala (an area of the brain that deals with stress) signals to the bone marrow to produce extra white blood cells. This causes the arteries to become inflamed, which can lead to heart attacks, angina and strokes.

Stress is unavoidable in daily life, but you must intentionally set aside time to rest, recharge, and rejuvenate to combat the effects of stress.

High blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol only happen to older people?

These are traditional risk factors for heart disease, but young adults might not even be aware if they have these ailments unless they go for regular health check-ups. There's no harm in going

for a medical check-up now and then, which helps you identify signs of early issues.

Some risk factors for heart disease cannot be controlled, such as your age or family history, but you can take steps to lower your risk by changing the factors you can control.

Dr Nabil added: “Small changes in your lifestyle, such as exercising and choosing healthy food options, can make a huge difference in your heart health.

“Prevention is better than cure, so it is best to get a heart screening and identify your risk factors early in order to take the necessary steps to protect and strengthen your heart.”