

BIOMEDICINE

From New Orleans, at a meeting of the American Heart Association

Big meals boost heart attack risk

A heavy meal can dramatically increase a person's risk of having a heart attack soon after eating, according to a new study. The risk increased 10-fold in the first hour following the oversized meal, reduced to 4-fold by the second, and was almost gone 3 hours later—all compared with the risk during the same period the day before, when some people in the study had eaten a normal meal.

Heavy meals could thus be an important trigger of heart attacks among people prone to heart disease—including those with high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes—says lead researcher Francisco Lopez-Jimenez of Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. The boost in risk may not matter as much to a young, healthy person, he says.

Lopez-Jimenez and his colleagues asked nearly 2,000 people who had had heart attacks about the meals they had eaten in the 26 hours before their attack. Of these, 158 reported eating an unusually heavy meal, and 25 of these people had eaten the big meal in the 2 hours before their heart attack.

"People should be aware of the sizes of each meal as well as the total number of calories they eat each day," says Lopez-Jimenez. "This is especially important for people who are trying to lose weight, since they often skip breakfast, have a light lunch, and then eat a big dinner."

—D.C.