High Blood Sugar Might Raise Risk of Complications After a Heart Attack or Stroke

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Here's one more reason folks living with diabetes or pre-diabetes should take care of their cardiovascular health. New findings published in the journal of British Pharmacology show high blood sugar levels may trigger more severe blockages in arteries that are already blocked, and potentially cause a patient to suffer complications after a heart attack or stroke, HealthDay reports.

A heart attack occurs when an artery that provides blood to the heart is blocked. A stroke can happen the same way, except the blockage occurs in arteries that supply blood to the brain. Both can be fatal. What's more, past research shows that both events are also more common among people suffering from diabetes.

To help better understand how diabetes affects the arteries of people suffering from this metabolic illness, a team of scientists at the University of Leicester in England conducted a controlled lab study to see exactly how sugar, or glucose, in the blood can change the behavior of these vital blood vessels.

Findings showed high blood sugar can cause human arteries to contract more than normal. Researchers theorized these blood-pumping contractions could raise a patient's blood pressure, decrease the flow of blood to their vital organs, and, ultimately, boost the risk of deadly complications after a cardiovascular event.

What's the cause? "We have identified a known signaling protein family, protein kinase C, is a key part of this enhanced contractile response," said Richard Rainbow, professor of cardiovascular cell physiology at the University of Leicester and the study's leader. He added that future therapies that inhibit these proteins could help reverse glucose's effect on the arteries.

For more information on how to reduce your risk of both cardiovascular disease and diabetes, click here.