HEART DISEASE IN FIREFIGHTERS

THE SILENT KILLER

The ERHPL research program includes studies important to the fire service:
- Fireground Rehab
- HazMat Protective Clothing
- Balance while wearing bunker gear
- And more

Dedicated to promoting health and safety for fire, EMS, and law enforcement through research and education...

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WWW.ERHPL.ORG
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OUR MISSION

Emergency responder activities are intrinsically dangerous. The Emergency Responder Human Performance Laboratory is dedicated to conduct research and assist in developing guidelines that improve the occupational health and safety of emergency responders. We seek to improve performance and safety during firefighting, hazardous materials incidents, and emergencies resulting from chemical, biological, and radiological agents by improving knowledge and understanding of the physiological stresses that accompany work in various forms of personal protective equipment.

THE FACTS

A 2007 study found that 45% of the firefighter line of duty deaths in the United States were caused by heart disease. 63% of these deaths occurred during fire suppression, responding to, or returning from fire alarms.

Nearly half of the sudden deaths in career firefighters occurred below age 45 and under age 55 in volunteer firefighters.

Sources: Kales et al 2007 Emergency duties and deaths from heart disease among firefighters in the United States. Fahy et al 2008 Firefighter Fatalities in the United States
Did you know that...
Out of 9600 firefighters tested by the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC)
- 37% had high or borderline high cholesterol
- Only 16.9% had normal blood pressure
- 44.7% were obese

All of these raise the risk of a heart attack, especially when combined with the high physical demands of firefighting!

The smoke and heat associated with firefighting, poor diet, and obesity may lead to blocked arteries. The heat stress that occurs with fire suppression can make platelets sticky.

What you can do

The Basics

**Quit Smoking** - Get help and quit to reduce your risk of a heart attack by six times.

**Control your weight** - Overweight and obesity causes many major health problems

**Get active** - Get 30 minutes of vigorous exercise that makes you break a sweat 4-5 times per week.

**Get right** - Eat foods low in fat including vegetables, fiber, and fruits

Be Safe

Wear your protective equipment on every call. Firefighting is dangerous enough without exposing yourself to toxic smoke.

Heart attacks are common up to 24 hours after fire calls. Watch for signs and symptoms.

Help prevent heat stress by removing turnout gear whenever it is safe to do so.

Know Your Risks

See your family physician **before** there is a problem. Don't be diagnosed with heart disease **after** you have had a heart attack.

Know the signs and symptoms of a heart attack including 1) chest discomfort, discomfort in other areas of the upper body, 3) cold sweats, 4) nausea, and 5) shortness of breath.

Know your cholesterol and blood pressure.

Discuss your risk factors for heart disease.

Lead by Example

Encourage others to adopt a healthier lifestyle by adding good diet and exercise habits into your day. Healthy living doesn't mean giving up the things you enjoy, it just means enjoying them in moderation.

Stay Informed

Websites by the NVFC (www.healthy-firefighter.org), IAFF (www.iaff.org/hs/fts/ftsdefault.asp), Firefighter Close Calls (www.firefighterclosecalls.com), ERHPL (www.firefighterresearch.org) and the NFPA (www.nfpa.org) provide good information for firefighter health, wellness, and safety.