

Heart doctors warn of looming crisis over childhood obesity

By Charlie Fidelman, Calgary Herald October 25, 2010
Photograph by: Herald Archive, Getty Images, Calgary Herald

Heart experts at the Canadian Cardiovascular Congress are warning of two alarming trends: a spike in heart disease as the population ages and new evidence of premature hardening of the arteries in obese children.

Fat children are showing the same signs of heart disease normally seen in aging adults, pediatrician Kevin Harris said earlier in an interview from B.C. Children's Hospital in Vancouver.

The heart of the average overweight 13-year-old is changing for the worse, warned Harris, one of 4,000 delegates at the congress being held in Montreal and co-hosted by the Canadian Cardiovascular Society and the Heart and Stroke Foundation.



Overweight kids are showing the same signs of heart disease as aging adults, a Canadian pediatrician warns.

"We often see congenital heart disease in children but to see acquired heart disease is unusual," Harris said.

Harris and his team evaluated 63 obese children with a body mass index of 33 who weighed 25 kilograms more than normal. Using a pulse wave velocity machine (ultrasound) to measure how fast blood flows through the aorta, researchers found that these obese children were already showing evidence of heart disease.

The finding is important because while the aortas were impaired, other measures of heart health were normal including blood pressure and lipid and cholesterol levels.

In adults, aortic stiffness is associated with heart attack, stroke and early death, Harris said. It's not known whether obesity will affect health outcomes in children, Harris said, but he speculated that it will be a risk factor for early heart disease.

Obesity is an emerging lifestyle health issue in pediatrics, said Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada spokesman George Honos.

The rate of childhood obesity has tripled over the last 25 years. On average, about 25 per cent of Canadian children between the ages of two and 17 are overweight or obese. That increases to 29 per cent among teens.

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