Hepatitis C May Hurt the Heart in Addition to the Liver

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Hepatitis C virus (HCV) is linked with plaque buildup in the arteries, a precursor to cardiovascular disease. Publishing their findings in The Journal of Infectious Diseases, researchers analyzed data on 994 men, 613 of whom were HIV-positive, 70 of whom were coinfected with HIV and HCV, and 17 of whom had only hep C.

After adjusting for various factors, the researchers found that those who had hep C, regardless of HIV status, had a 29 percent greater likelihood of higher coronary artery calcium, a 26 percent greater likelihood of having any plaque buildup, and a 42 percent greater likelihood of having noncalcified plaque.

Additionally, study participants with higher hep C viral loads were 50 percent more likely to have clogged arteries than those who did not have hep C.

“We have strong reason to believe that infection with hepatitis C fuels cardiovascular disease, independent of HIV, and sets the stage for subsequent cardiovascular trouble,” the study’s principal investigator, Eric Seaberg, PhD, an assistant professor of epidemiology at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “We believe our findings are relevant to anyone infected with hepatitis C regardless of HIV status.”

“People infected with hepatitis C are already followed regularly for signs of liver disease, but our findings suggest clinicians who care for them should also assess their overall cardiac risk profile regularly,” study author Wendy Post, MD, MS, a professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins, said in the same release.

To read the press release, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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