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## Findings tie iron to heart attacks

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS — A study published Tuesday suggests a strong link between heart disease and levels of iron in the blood and says only smoking is a more significant risk factor in causing heart attacks.

The study by Finnish researchers is the first to clinically tie iron to heart disease, and even its authors say more study is needed before medical practice is changed.

But the findings bolster a theory that has been largely discounted for more than a decade.

If supported by further research, the findings could challenge current medical recommendations for the amount of iron in the diet.

Heart attacks are the leading killer in the United States and in most other industrial countries. In eastern Finland, where the study was conducted, they are the highest in the world.

Iron is a necessary element in the blood, allowing it to carry oxygen, and its absence can cause anemia. In addition to over-the-counter vitamin supplements containing extra iron, U.S. wheat products are required by law to have added iron.

The study confirms that iron "is

### Study suggests lower blood iron level as reason why women outlive men

a strong risk factor" for heart disease, "at levels previously regarded as normal," said Dr. Jerome L. Sullivan, a researcher at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center and Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston.

The study said iron stored in the body was second only to cigarette smoking as a predictor of heart attacks.

"Finally someone has produced some evidence that my theory might be correct," said Sullivan, who predicted the link in 1981. "People have begun to see this might be a valid idea."

Sullivan bases his theories on the much lower rates of heart disease among menstruating women.

"Women lose their iron stores through menstruating for a large part of their adult lives, and they outlive men," Sullivan said.

Many studies have concluded that the hormone estrogen present in menstruating women helps protect them from heart disease. After menopause, estrogen levels decrease and the incidence of heart disease among women rises.

The study, and Sullivan's accompanying editorial, were published Tuesday in *Circulation*, a

journal of the American Heart Association, based in Dallas.

Experts cautioned that the study raises questions but doesn't answer them.

"It is impossible until this is looked at in a carefully controlled way to know if it's going to be important or not," said Dr. Neal Stone, a professor at Northwestern University who is chairman of the association's national nutrition committee.

While he stressed that much more research needs to be done, Dr. Henry Ginsberg said the findings should tell Americans to quit taking unnecessary dietary supplements.

"If there was any type of take-home message, it would be that we all shouldn't be taking extra vitamins and extra minerals," said Ginsberg, head of the division of preventative medicine and nutrition at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons.

"Supplements are probably not very useful in most cases," he said.

Dr. Mary Ann Malloy, who served on a heart association committee looking at women and heart disease, said the study

brings into question the "more better" approach to vitamins and minerals.

She said further research would need to include women, because longer periods of time and look more numbers.

The researchers, led by Dr. Jukka T. Salonen, tracked 1,981 men in eastern Finland for five years ending in 1989. The researchers found that for each 1 percent increase in the amount of the iron-containing protein ferritin in the blood, heart attack risk increased more than 4 percent.

#### Key findings:

• High level of iron in the blood linked to risk of heart attacks.

• Researchers studied 1,981 men in eastern Finland for five years, and found that for each 1 percent increase in the amount of iron-carrying ferritin in the blood, heart attack risk increased more than 4 percent.

• Data showed high level of iron was second only to smoking as a predictor of heart attacks, ahead of high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes and other risk factors.

## Man surrenders after shooting parents-in-law

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FREDERICKSBURG — A 34-year-old man who police say shot his wife's parents to death barricaded himself in a small hunting cabin and held law officers at bay for several hours Tuesday.

Gillespie County Sheriff Milton Jung said a murder warrant was issued for the man, Scott Panetti of Fredericksburg. The bodies of Panetti's parents-in-law — Jose and Amanda Alvarado, both 62 — were found at their Fredericksburg home after neighbors reported hearing gunshots about 5:30 a.m.

Panetti then took his wife and their 3-year-old daughter to the hunting camp just outside the city, but later released the two without serious injuries, authorities said.

He had barricaded himself in the one-room cabin, Jung said. The sheriff said he believed

that Panetti had been armed with a high-powered deer rifle.

Texas Department of Public Safety spokeswoman Laureen Chernow said a SWAT team of 10 DPS officers had surrounded the small red cabin by early afternoon and were trying to establish communication with the man.

Panetti surrendered around 3:40 p.m. after speaking with some officers, said DPS spokesman Mike Cox. Cox said no shots were fired and Panetti was arrested.

Jung said he did not know what was discussed during the meeting with Panetti.

"He just said that I'm coming out I do know that. He came out with his hands up," Jung said.

The sheriff's department whisked Panetti away in a squad car. Panetti's head had been fully shaved, and Jung said that he had changed into a suit.

"He was a very strange man," he said.

Fredericksburg Police Chief Bob Werns said Tuesday's double-slaying was the first homicide in Fredericksburg in more than 2 years.

Both the police chief and the sheriff said they have known Panetti for years. They described him as an unemployed former Navy man who had been in the Veterans Administration hospital in nearby Kerrville several times for mental problems.

"He's on medication and when he doesn't take his medication properly he gets violent," Jung said, adding that he didn't know what medicine Panetti was taking.

The officers also said Panetti has had previous brushes with the law for drug- and alcohol-related problems and that he was arrested in 1989 on a charge of making a terrorist threat against a peace officer.

## Lobbyists seek health coverage reform

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

AUSTIN — A coalition of citizen rights groups Tuesday urged a state task force to reaffirm its original recommendation of a health insurance plan to cover every Texan.

Leaders of more than 15 organizations criticized the Governor's Health Policy Task Force for backing away from its proposal to replace privately purchased health insurance with publicly-funded coverage.

Last month, the task force recommended that Texans be covered under a plan overseen by the state and administered by a single insurer.

But that proposal prompted immediate condemnation by business and insurance lobbyists as "socialized medicine."

"Moscow tried that long, long

ago," Larry Milner, a member of the task force and president of the Texas Chamber of Commerce, had said.

In the face of the criticism, the task force watered down its recommendation, and instead suggested that the single insurer proposal be adopted for children and pregnant women. The task force said coverage for all Texans should be a goal.

But that doesn't go far enough, according to labor, elderly, disabled, and public watchdog groups.

"The single payer plan is the only true solution to handle the health care crisis in Texas," said Ron Cranston, of the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities.

Currently, between 3 million and 4 million Texans, including 1 million children, have no health insurance, according to the task

force. The panel also reported that more and more of the uninsured are coming from working families who cannot afford insurance.

Gov. Ann Richards has said she wants health care reform to be one of the major topics tackled by lawmakers during the regular legislative session that starts in January.

Tim Curtis, of Texas Citizen Action, said Milner's comments were irresponsible and misleading. He said in so-called socialized medicine plans, doctors work for the government, while under the state task force's original proposal "the doctors work for us."

Milner defended his comments, saying, "I don't think telling the truth is irresponsible. I don't think that more government and more taxes are the solution to our problems."

Curtis' group has recommend-

ed a 5 percent payroll tax to fund the health care plan.

That is cheaper than the current private insurance system, Curtis said, and provides coverage to all Texans.

He said the insurance companies opposing publicly funded health care "are the same ones who are plundering the system and will continue to gain from it."

An insurance industry spokesman denied the allegation by Curtis.


"Insurers are not plundering the system. They are being forced to pay for medical charges that have simply gotten out of control," said Jerry Johns.

But Johns added the insurance industry opposes "any system that would tend to socialize health insurance and remove it from the private sector."

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