

Does Stress Cause Heart Attacks? Psychosocial factors in coronary heart disease

Papers based on presentations at a meeting held in
London 18 and 19 November 1985 organized by the
Coronary Prevention Group

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PART I*

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Foreword

The Coronary Prevention Group was formed in 1979 in response to the need for an impartial voluntary organization to provide information on the aetiology and prevention of coronary heart disease.

In addition to the established risk factors of cigarette smoking and hypertension coupled with dietary-induced hyperlipidaemia, stress is popularly believed to be a major factor associated with coronary heart disease (CHD). There is now a substantial body of research which has examined the stress-related characteristics of work, lifestyle and environment, and has considered how they may be associated with cardiovascular risk. However, there still exists much controversy within the medical and scientific world about the role of psychosocial factors in the development of CHD.

In arranging the two day conference 'Does Stress Cause Heart Attacks?', it was the objective of the Coronary Prevention Group to bring stress as a risk factor for CHD into the realm of scientific discourse, and to bring together those with differing viewpoints,

so that they could meet each other and constructively exchange ideas.

Issues explored at the conference included the physiological and pathological effects of stress on the human body; how stress interacts with and increases the effect of other major risk factors in the development of CHD; the Type A personality/behaviour pattern; stress and industry, with speakers from the trade unions, management and the Health and Safety Executive; unemployment, and health in a recession; how individuals and organizations can protect against and cope with stressful situations at work and at home and the benefits to health of support networks in the community.

More work clearly needs to be done on the significance of psychosocial factors in CHD to answer a number of questions. The Coronary Prevention Group believes that the meeting clearly showed that certain aspects of stress can be open to research which could result in helping to prevent coronary disease and improving quality of life.