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Risk Factors in Early Life as Predictors of Adult Heart Disease: The Bogalusa Heart Study

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ABSTRACT

The adult heart diseases, coronary artery disease and essential hypertension, are now clearly recognized to begin in childhood. The evidence comes from autopsy studies of cardiovascular-renal changes in the first two decades of life. Cardiovascular risk factors can be identified in children just as in adults and these have a high correlation with the anatomic disease. This relationship underscores the importance of risk factor screening of children. Of interest is that clinical risk factors tend to persist within a rank (track) so that studies in childhood can be predictive of future levels. Behavior and lifestyle of eating, cigarette smoking, alcohol intake, and use of oral contraceptive pills influence risk factors in children. Familial aggregation of risk factors are also noted. Studies of apolipoproteins, B and A-I, have identified subsets of children that have a greater frequency of paternal myocardial infarction. The findings from the Bogalusa Heart Study suggest that risk factors in early childhood are important in the development of cardiac disease.
and other epidemiological studies of children show the need to begin prevention of adult heart disease in early life. Approaches to prevention should include high risk families and children and a public health or population approach. Cardiovascular health education for elementary school children should be directed to children in the general population in an effort to encourage them to adopt healthy life styles.

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