Health & Medicine

Artery-Clearing Procedure Comes Up Short

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A procedure widely used to clear clogged arteries during a heart attack may not help patients in the long run, shows a recent Columbia University Medical Center study, which was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Distal microcirculatory protection is used to remove fatty deposits and blood clots from arteries. CUMC researchers examined patients in 38 institutions in seven countries and discovered that the procedure doesn't necessarily improve patients' health in the long term.

Physicians started using distal microcirculatory protection several years ago on patients undergoing cardiac arrest. It is performed during an angioplasty — which opens narrowed or clogged blood vessels of the heart — to clear blockages caused by fatty deposits and blood clots that break off and clog smaller arteries farther downstream. The Columbia researchers found that although the procedure successfully removed debris from the arteries during a heart attack, within six months the patients had nearly the same subsequent heart attack and death rates as those who had not had the procedure.

"It is likely that damage to the heart occurs from several causes, and thus the use of distal protection, though effective in removing blood clots and fat, is simply too little, too late," says Gregg Stone, MD, the lead researcher of the study, director of research and education for the Center for Interventional Vascular Therapy at CUMC and New York-Presbyterian Hospital/CUMC, and vice chairman of the Cardiovascular Research Center.



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