

Study Led by Saint Luke's Mid America Heart Institute Finds Widespread Evidence of Heart Disease in Ancient Mummies

Largest systematic study of atherosclerosis in ancient human remains suggests innate human predisposition to heart disease

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, UNITED STATES, May 28, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Heart disease is usually thought of as a disease of modern times, but a new study of ancient mummies expands evidence that humans have suffered from the condition for thousands of years across the globe.

“ This further supports our previous observation that it [atherosclerosis] is not just a modern condition caused by our modern lifestyles.”

Randall Thompson, MD

The findings of the Global HORUS Study, published in the European Heart Journal, suggests humans have an innate predisposition to atherosclerosis, or a build-up of plaque in the arteries that can lead to heart attack and stroke.

Researchers analyzed the CT scans from 237 adult mummies from around the world and found definite or probable atherosclerosis, marked by calcifications in the artery walls, in more than 37%.

The mummies were from seven different cultures spanning over 4,000 years and included ancient Egyptian, lowland ancient Peruvians, ancient highland Andean Bolivians, 19th century Aleutian Islander hunter-gatherers, 16th century Greenlandic Inuits, ancestral Puebloan, and Middle-Ages Gobi Desert pastoralists.

While previous research has found atherosclerosis in ancient mummies, the HORUS Study is the largest systematic study of the condition in ancient human remains across multiple eras and geographies.

“We found atherosclerosis in all time periods—dating before 2,500 BCE—in both men and women, in all seven cultures that were studied, and in both elites and non-elites,” said [Randall Thompson, MD](#), lead author of the study and cardiologist at [Saint Luke’s Mid America Heart Institute](#). “This further supports our previous observation that it is not just a modern condition

caused by our modern lifestyles.”

Researchers note that although the frequency of the disease in the group studied may be surprising, especially since the estimated mean age of 40 is young by today’s standards—most cases were consistent with early disease that is often found incidentally on CT scans of modern patients.

“This study indicates modern cardiovascular risk factors—such as smoking, sedentary lifestyle, and poor diet—on top of the underlying, inherent risk natural to the human aging process may increase the extent and impact of atherosclerosis,” Dr. Thompson said. “This is why it is all the more important to control the risk factors we can control.”

Pointing out the study’s limitations, including a varying degree of preservation and the impact of the mummification process on tissue, researchers note they were very conservative in assessing the presence of atherosclerosis while analyzing the scans.



Volume-rendered CT image demonstrating extensive atherosclerosis (arrows) in the aorta of a female mummy from ancient Peru (Rosita)

Read the full article “[Atherosclerosis in Ancient Mummified Humans: The Global HORUS Study](#)” in the European Heart Journal.

About Saint Luke’s Mid America Heart Institute

Saint Luke’s Mid America Heart Institute is part of Saint Luke’s Health System, which serves the West Region of BJC Health System, one of the largest nonprofit health care organizations in the United States. The Heart Institute, a teaching affiliate of the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine, is one of the distinguished cardiovascular programs in the country. Its legacy of innovation began more than 40 years ago when it opened as the nation’s first freestanding heart hospital. Since then, the Heart Institute has earned a global reputation for excellence in the treatment of heart disease, including interventional cardiology, cardiovascular surgery, imaging, heart failure, transplant, heart disease prevention, cardiometabolic disease, women’s heart disease, electrophysiology, outcomes research, and health economics. Saint Luke’s Mid America Heart Institute cardiologists offer personalized cardio-oncology care, where our experts diagnose and treat heart conditions in patients who have been or are being treated for cancer.

With more than 100 full-time, board-certified cardiovascular specialists on staff, Saint Luke’s Mid America Heart Institute offers one of the country’s largest heart failure and heart transplant

programs, has the largest experience with transcatheter aortic valve replacement in the Midwest, and is a global teaching site for the newest approaches in coronary revascularization. The Heart Institute's cardiovascular research program encompasses clinical areas as well as centers of excellence and core laboratories. It continues to serve as one of the four Analytic Centers, along with Duke, Harvard, and Yale, for the American College of Cardiology's National Cardiovascular Data Registry.

Saint Luke's Mid America Heart Institute is ranked 47th in the nation for Cardiology, Heart & Vascular Surgery by U.S. News & World Report and is the third hospital in the U.S. to achieve the Comprehensive Cardiac Center certification from The Joint Commission.

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