

Watching Sports May Be Bad for Your Heart

By Jo Cavallo

One study showed the risk for cardiac arrest soared to two to four times higher while watching heart-pounding sports events. But does it matter if your team wins or loses? Can the excitement of watching heart-pounding sports matches be bad for your heart? According to research published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, the answer is yes. A group of German researchers compared cardiac events in Munich during the five weeks of the 2006 World Cup, held in Germany, to the number of cardiac events during other times of the year and found that on the days the German team played, cardiac emergencies more than tripled for men and nearly doubled for women. The greatest risk was for those fans who already suffered from heart disease, with their chance of having a heart attack or other cardiac problem soaring to four times higher during the games. The risk was double for those fans who didn't have a history of heart problems.

"Apparently, of prime importance for triggering a stress-induced event is not the outcome of a game—a win or loss—but rather the intense strain and excitement experienced during the viewing of a dramatic match, such as one with a penalty shootout," wrote the study authors. The researchers suggested that doctors take into consideration the effect watching sporting events may have on their heart disease patients and consider increasing a patient's medication dose to compensate for the additional stress.

Staying Heart Healthy

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), heart disease is the number-one cause of death for both men and women in the U.S. If you're concerned about how watching adrenaline-inducing sporting matches may affect the health of your heart, talk with your doctor about how you can stay heart healthy both during exciting sporting events and all yearlong. These tips can help:

- **Reduce stress.** Chronic stress can cause your blood pressure and heart rate to rise, increasing your risk for heart disease. Maintaining a regular exercise program that includes at least 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity most days of the week and trying other stress-busting methods like yoga and meditation can help reduce stress levels.
- **Quit smoking.** Smoking is one of the biggest risk factors for developing heart disease. Quitting smoking dramatically reduces your risk for developing heart disease within just one year.
- **Get enough sleep.** Aim for six to eight hours of sleep each night.
- **Give yourself a pep talk.** Positive self-talk is a good way to deal with stress, but negative self-talk can have the opposite effect, increasing stress levels, according to the AHA. To help you feel better, practice positive self-talk every day. For example, "I'll do the best I can," rather than "I can't do this."