

Experts: Heart Patients To Avoid Rush Hour Traffic



In a paper published this week in the European Heart Journal, heart patients have been advised to avoid being outside during rush hour traffic.

The paper was written by experts from the European Society of Cardiology and focuses on air pollution and cardiovascular disease. The authors also recommend decreasing the use of fossil fuels.

According to Professor Robert F. Storey, corresponding author of the paper, “more than 3 million deaths worldwide are caused by air pollution each year. Air pollution ranks ninth among the modifiable disease risk factors, ahead of low physical activity, high sodium diet, high cholesterol and drug use. There is now ample evidence that air pollution is associated with cardiovascular morbidity and mortality. It not only makes existing heart conditions worse but also contributes to development of the disease.”

Professor Storey believes that avoiding air pollution may help in reducing cardiovascular risk and that is why it is important for cardiologists to advise heart patients to do so. He also suggests that there is a need to increase pressure on policy makers to reduce levels of air pollution.

Using the criteria from the WHO, approximately 90 percent of Europeans are exposed to air pollution levels that are damaging to their health. Around one-third of Europeans living in urban areas are exposed to levels above European Union standards.

The paper recommends that the following actions should be taken to reduce exposure to air pollution:

- Avoid cars and motorbikes and travel by walking, cycling and public transportation.
- Avoid inefficient use burning of biomass for domestic heating.
- Avoid walking and cycling during rush hour traffic and in streets with high traffic intensity.
- Exercise in parks and gardens but try to avoid major traffic roads.
- Avoid going outdoors during highly polluted periods especially the elderly, infants and those with cardiorespiratory disorders.
- For those living in high pollution areas, it would be a good idea to consider ventilation systems.

According to the authors, policy makers need to play an important role in reducing outdoor pollution. They also add that planning authorities should be encouraged to incentivise housing developments that are a reasonable distance from congested roads and polluting industries.

Professor Storey concluded: “Air pollution should be considered one of the major modifiable risk factors to prevent and manage cardiovascular disease. Individuals, especially those with or at risk of cardiovascular disease, can take measures to reduce their exposure and doctors should include these in lifestyle advice. Policy makers urgently need to reduce levels of air pollution and this should be backed up by legislation.”

Source: European Society of Cardiology

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