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HEADLINE: AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION: CONFERENCE IN ATLANTA Study refutes risk of high iron level

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BODY:

In a startling report published last year, Finnish researchers suggested that a high level of iron more than doubles the risk of heart attack in men. Their finding made headlines around the world.

Now, a study of autopsy reports going back as far as 1889 refutes that finding. Researchers reported Thursday that they found a "surprising" lack of clogged arteries, which cause heart attacks, among "iron overload" cases.

"People with iron overload do not appear to have significant amounts of coronary artery disease," said Dr. Michael Miller, director of preventive cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center.

He and Dr. Grover M. Hutchins of Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore reported the findings at the annual meeting of the American Heart Association in Atlanta. They studied autopsies selected from a registry of 48,000 reports filed at the hospital between 1889 and 1993.

They studied 130 patients, comparing 65 adults whose records mentioned iron overload with a group of "controls" who did not have the condition. Only three of the iron overload patients had a severe blockage in a coronary artery, which supplies blood to the heart, the researchers said.

Three times as many patients in the control group had significant coronary blockages.

"People with iron overload tended to have less - certainly not more - coronary disease," Miller said.

Researchers at the University of Kuopio in Finland suggested last year that men whose blood ferritin measured more than 200 micrograms a liter were more than twice as likely to have a heart attack as men with a lower amount. Ferritin is a protein that binds iron in the body.

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