Child care can tax grandma's health [US] [1]

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Many children spend after-school hours at grandmother's house. But if grandma's health is not good, child care can take a toll on her heart. That's the finding from a new study, the first of its kind, published in the November American Journal of Public Health.

"We found that providing child care for just a few hours a day greatly increased risk of heart disease," author Sunmin Lee, ScD, an epidemiologist with Harvard School of Public Health and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, tells WebMD.

The study focuses on 13,392 women caring for grandchildren, the women were all around age 60. All were registered nurses; nearly half still worked full time while the rest had retired or were working limited hours.

The risk of heart disease for women reporting nine or more hours of child care per week was 55% higher than women providing no care to grandchildren. However, in those grandmothers caring for grandchildren, having a job outside the home appeared to decrease this risk somewhat.

Chronic stress from regular child care is likely the problem. "It's not like they take care of the children for awhile, then the kids are gone," Lee tells WebMD. "For most of these grandmothers, this is a daily responsibility. We know that chronic stress is bad for heart health. Stress raises blood pressure, causes wear and tear on arteries, and leads to heart disease."

Lee's study points to the need for regular checkups, regular exercise, and other lifestyle changes as women get older, says Joseph Miller, MD, a preventive cardiologist at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta. "This study shows the importance of caregivers taking better care of themselves than they do."

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Care giving to children and grandchildren add risk of coronary heart disease in women [2]
by Sunmin Lee, Graham Colditz, Lisa Berkman, and Ichiro Kawachi
SOURCE: American Journal of Public Health, November 2003, Vol 93, No. 11
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