

Adults

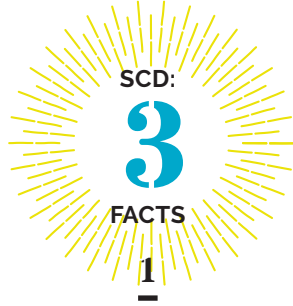


DR ERIC HONG
CARDIOLOGIST

Competitive runs and triathlons are very popular and drawing in more middle-aged adults who work in sedentary jobs during the week and turn into 'weekend warriors' who push their bodies often to extreme levels once or twice a week.

These non-elite athletes, says Cardiologist **Dr Eric Hong**, are the ones particularly at risk of Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD).

Every day in Singapore, three people die from SCD. 90% are men in their late 40s, and the main cause is coronary artery disease. Women SCD victims are usually aged about 50.



1
SCD is most likely to happen in the final 1.6km of a full marathon.

2
Most SCD victims suffer from pre-existing coronary heart disease which they may or may not be aware of.

3
Many people with normal ECG heart tracing may have extensive coronary heart disease even though blood flow through the heart has not been compromised yet.

Heart disease is, in general, more common in men, as extreme sports are more popular with men. The risk increases if they have a history of coronary heart disease, or have had a heart attack, coronary stents, bypass surgery or a known history of reduced heart function with chronic illnesses such as diabetes or kidney disease. An undiagnosed heart condition or an undetected infection can also cause SCD.

What is SCD?

"Picture this," says Dr Hong. "It is the final 1.6km of a marathon. The body is undergoing extreme stress. The final sprint to the end with a sudden stop increases the risk of SCD, which typically takes the form of a serious abnormal rhythm of the heart (arrhythmia). This disruption in the rhythm of the heart causes the heart muscle to stop pumping. This abnormal rhythm occurs in about 90% of SCD victims."

Many of these deaths, explains Dr Hong, happen during increases in physical activity such as running a marathon. In most cases, there appears to be no – or minimal – risk.

Prevention

Those with any of these conditions should have their cardiac health assessed before embarking on an exercise or sporting activity regimen, especially if they are doing so after a long lay-off or have a history of sporadic exercise.

Appropriate cardiac health screening can diagnose many of the risks, after which medication, lifestyle modification and surgical intervention come into play.

Some avoid knowing their risks, but the consequences of any premature cardiac arrest or death go beyond you to your loved ones. Sudden cardiac arrest is not rare; surviving it is.



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