**You really CAN die of a broken heart: Stress from the death of a partner found to trigger potentially fatal heart rhythm**

* **Grief boosts the chance of developing an irregular heartbeat - itself a risk factor for heart failure or a stroke - by more than 40 per cent**
* **The danger can last for up to a year after the death of a loved-one**
* **And is greatest when the loss comes as a shock or occurs to young people**

By [BEN SPENCER MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT FOR THE DAILY MAIL](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?s=&authornamef=Ben+Spencer+Medical+Correspondent+For+The+Daily+Mail)

**PUBLISHED:** 23:30, 5 April 2016 | **UPDATED:** 00:51, 6 April 2016

Losing a loved one really may break your heart, research suggests.

People who lose a partner are at an increased risk of developing an irregular heartbeat for the next 12 months, scientists found.

The condition, known as atrial fibrillation, in turn increases the chance of stroke and heart failure.

People who become bereaved are more than 40 per cent more likely to develop the condition than those who have not lost a partner, researchers found.

The risk appeared to be even greater in younger people after the death of their loved one - particularly when the loss is unexpected.

Danish researchers collected data from almost 89,000 people diagnosed with atrial fibrillation between 1995 and 2014, which they compared to the health records of 886,000 healthy people.

Some 17,478 of those diagnosed with atrial fibrillation had lost their partner, as had 168,940 of the comparison group.

The researchers calculated that the risk of developing an irregular heartbeat for the first time was 41 per cent higher among those who had been bereaved.

The study, published in the UK medical journal Open Heart, found the risk was highest eight to 14 days after the loss, after which it gradually declined.

The team found that only after a year does a bereaved person’s risk drop to the same as someone who has not suffered such a loss.

Bereaved people under the age of 60 were more than twice as likely to develop atrial fibrillation if they had suffered a loss.

Risk was also heightened when the partner’s death was deemed to be unexpected - those whose partners were relatively healthy in the month before death were 57 per cent more likely to develop an irregular heartbeat.

Atrial fibrillation is the most common heart rhythm disturbance, affecting around one million people in the UK.

It becomes more common as you get older, affecting about seven in 100 people aged over 65.

‘The loss of a partner is considered one of the most severely stressful life events and is likely to affect most people, independently of coping mechanisms,’ wrote the scientists, of Aarhus University in Denmark.

‘In this large population-based study, the severely stressful life event of losing a partner was associated with a transiently increased risk of atrial fibrillation, which lasted for about one year.

‘The elevated risk was especially high for those who were young and those who lost a relatively healthy partner.

‘Bereavement is a major life event, which is known to increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, mental illness and death.’

Maureen Talbot, senior cardiac nurse at the British Heart Foundation, said: ‘The bereavement of a partner is a devastating event in anyone’s life but the effect can be even worse when a death is sudden or premature.

‘Our research has shown how emotional stress can have an adverse effect on the heart but this study also highlights a significant physical effect - a greater risk of developing atrial fibrillation when recently bereaved. This risk appears even greater the more sudden the death or younger that person is.

‘Studies to increase understanding of the cause of this finding are needed but it is important to ensure the newly bereaved, regardless of their age, are monitored and supported by their loved ones and to see their GP if they experience any symptoms.’

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-3524927/You-really-die-broken-heart-Stress-death-partner-trigger-potentially-fatal-heart-rhythm.html#ixzz4BkjTEgtU>   
Follow us: [@MailOnline on Twitter](http://ec.tynt.com/b/rw?id=bBOTTqvd0r3Pooab7jrHcU&u=MailOnline) | [DailyMail on Facebook](http://ec.tynt.com/b/rf?id=bBOTTqvd0r3Pooab7jrHcU&u=DailyMail" \t "_blank)