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**Vessels linked to coronary survival rates**  
  
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TINY blood vessels that provide a 'back-up' system for the heart help people survive heart attacks, a study has found.

The blood vessels, called coronary collaterals, effectively act as a natural heart by-pass.

They transport blood to heart muscle while avoiding blocked arteries.

A study published in the European Heart Journal has shown that patients with many of these vessels have a 36 per cent reduced risk of dying from heart disease.

'We should find means to promote these natural by-pass vessels in order to improve outcomes for patients with heart disease,' said Dr Pascal Meier, of the Heart Hospital in London.

'We now need to understand why these vessels work better in some and not others,' Dr Meier added.

The Express

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**Natural 'back-up system' that could save your heart**  
**BYLINE:** By Jo Willey Health Correspondent  
  
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THE heart has its own "back-up system" to help it function even if main arteries are blocked, scientists have found.

A series of tiny blood vessels called collaterals can act as a natural bypass system when arteries are clogged, a team at University College London revealed.

The collaterals connect to the larger vessels in the heart and carry blood around blockages.

Patients with lots of these vessels were found to have a 36 per cent reduced risk of death from heart disease, Britain's biggest killer.

Experts hope the find means they can create new ways to slash the number of deaths from cardiac disease.

Most heart attacks happen because of a gradual build-up of fatty material in main arteries.

Finding a way to avoid blockages would be a major breakthrough.

The researchers, who worked with colleagues from Germany and the US, said yesterday that collaterals could be a major new target for drugs and treatments.

The study, published online today in the European Heart Journal, pooled data from 12 trials involving 6,529 patients.

Lead author Dr Pascal Meier of UCL said: "A growing body of research demonstrates that these vessels are protective and reduce mortality in patients with blocked coronary arteries.

We should find means to promote these natural bypass vessels."

Maureen Talbot, senior cardiac nurse at the British Heart Foundation, said: "These backup blood vessels seem to play a very important role in helping maintain blood supply to the heart, and this interesting research is encouraging.

"We need to understand why these vessels work better in some and not others and if it might be related to increased physical activity, which is great for your heart."