

published in Reader's Digest,  
03 August 2020

[link to Reader's Digest article](#) [1]

[heart](#) [2] [infection](#) [3] [COVID-19](#) [4]



One in four people in the UK and one in three globally die from heart and circulatory diseases. High blood pressure, obesity, smoking and diabetes are recognised risk factors, but here are another four that you might not expect...

## Car and aircraft noise

In 1910, the Nobel Prize winner [Robert Koch](#) [5] predicted that, “One day man will have to fight noise as fiercely as plague and cholera,” and he was right.

In 2009, the [World Health Organization](#) [6] published its “Night noise guidelines for Europe”; in 2011, it published a 106-page document entitled, “[Burden of disease from environmental noise](#) [7]”, highlighting the adverse effects of traffic noise in particular. It’s estimated that every year in Western Europe, a staggering 61,000 years of healthy life are lost to disability or death through heart attacks or angina associated with traffic noise.

A study in the [European Heart Journal](#) [8] involving 41,000 people in five countries showed that life at 65 decibels (equivalent to conversational speech) raised the risk of high blood pressure by six per cent when compared to life at 55 decibels (equivalent to a quiet office)—perhaps through alerting the nervous system or increasing levels of stress hormones.

## Combustion

More noxious than noise are traffic fumes. Factories, power generators, wood burning and smoking also send out scores of tiny pollution particles that can wreak havoc for your heart.

The [same study](#) [8] in the European Heart Journal found that “among adults, up to one extra person per 100 people of the same age group living in the most polluted areas of cities would develop high blood pressure

compared to those living in the less polluted areas. This risk is similar to the effect of being overweight.”

Air pollution can also increase risk of heart attack, [palpitations](#) [9] and [stroke](#) [10], perhaps by damaging the inside walls of your blood vessels, making them narrower and harder or by making your blood more likely to clot.

## Cold weather

Winnipeg, Canada is one of the coldest cities in the world. In February 2019, temperatures dropped to -32°C.

Looking back at data spanning six years (and 1817 heart attacks), one group of [Winnipeg scientists](#) [11] found a clear relationship between daily temperature and risk of heart attack, with the risk increasing by seven per cent with every 10°C drop in the daily high temperature.

Cold weather can increase blood pressure through narrowing blood vessels. Your heart has to work harder to keep your body warm and the cold can also increase the risk of developing blood clots, which could lead to a [heart attack](#) [12] or [stroke](#) [13]. Staying indoors, being less active and eating more during cold weather are themselves risk factors. 4

## COVID-19?

I had a strange irregular heartbeat for a few days in mid-March. Working as a nurse I wondered whether this could be an unrecognised symptom of COVID-19. Putting it down to panic at the time, I've since learned that COVID-19 can indeed cause cardiac complications.

[Dr Valentin Fuster](#) [14], Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of the American College of Cardiology, focusses on the effects of the coronavirus on blood vessels, explaining how attack here triggers a massive response by the immune system leading to organ damage (including the heart and lungs) and blood clotting. It's also possible that the virus attacks the heart itself, resulting in heart attacks and palpitations.

Through bereavement, COVID-19 has caused much heartbreak—often stealing lives through damaging a loved one's heart. Understanding this may lead to new, effective treatments. Already [blood-thinning drugs](#) [15] are being considered, and showing some promise.



---

Source URL: <https://helencowan.co.uk/unexpected-things-can-damage-your-heart>

### Links

[1] <https://www.readersdigest.co.uk/health/wellbeing/unexpected-things-that-can-damage-your-heart> [2] <https://helencowan.co.uk/..tags/heart> [3] <https://helencowan.co.uk/..tags/infection> [4] <https://helencowan.co.uk/..tags/COVID-19> [5] <https://www.readersdigest.co.uk/health/wellbeing/how-victorian-britain-revolutionised-the-health-industry> [6] <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/noise/policy/who-night-noise-guidelines-for-europe#:~:text=According%20to%20these%20guidelines%2C%20annual,as%20sleep%20disturbance%20and%20insomnia.> [7] [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/136466/e94888.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/136466/e94888.pdf) [8] <https://academic.oup.com/eurheartj/article/38/2/71/2965194> [9] <https://www.cardiosmart.org/News-and-Events/2013/06/Air-Pollution-Triggers-Irregular-Heartbeat> [10] <https://www.bmj.com/content/350/bmj.h1295> [11] <http://www.bmj.com/content/350/bmj.h1295>

---

[ps://www.escardio.org/The-ESC/Press-Office/Press-releases/Cold-weather-associated-with-higher-risk-of-severe-heart-attack](https://www.escardio.org/The-ESC/Press-Office/Press-releases/Cold-weather-associated-with-higher-risk-of-severe-heart-attack) [12] <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/conditions/heart-attack> [13]  
<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/conditions/stroke> [14]  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0735109720346374> [15] <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus-blood-thinning-drugs-treatment-covid-study-clots-patients-a9519061.html>