

[IMAGE]

Skate at Your Own Risk

Over 500,000 men and 70,000 women in Canada regularly play recreational ice hockey, as do many of their American counterparts. Playing hockey on roller skates is another popular recreational sport. These activities subject participants to intense aerobic activity, though, which in older adults has been linked to a higher risk for heart attacks.

The authors of a recent study in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* decided to investigate a link between playing recreational hockey and suffering from heart attacks in middle-aged men, after they had treated multiple patients who had suffered a heart attack following play. The authors monitored the heart rates of 113 recreational ice hockey players over 35 years old, using electrocardiographic monitoring devices before, during, and after hockey games. Data were used to determine heart rates and presence of arrhythmias (irregular heart beats).

For every player, maximum heart rate during play was higher than target exercise heart rate; in three-quarters of players, heart rates were in excess of predicted heart rate. In 70% of cases, heart recovery rate was "poor" following play, and arrhythmias were found in two players.

The elevated exercise level during recreational hockey and other vigorous sports may cause a dangerously high cardiac response in middle-aged or older adults. Excessive aerobic activity in the players in this study led to heart rates higher than target and maximum rates, and poor recovery rates. If you are over 35 years old and not in excellent physical condition, hold off on participating in highly demanding sports like ice hockey until you're in better shape.

Reference:

Atwal S, Porter J, MacDonald P. Cardiovascular effects of strenuous exercise in adult recreational hockey: The Hockey Heart Study. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 2002;166(3), pp. 303-307.

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