
■ Heart Bypass linked to lingering brain damage

The New England Journal of Medicine recently reported that Heart Bypass surgery causes serious, lingering brain damage in as many as 25,000 Americans per year.

Six percent of people undergoing Heart Bypass surgery suffer significant, perhaps permanent, brain damage. “That's a frightening figure for an elective procedure,” said the director of the study, Dr. Dennis Mangano of the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

Worldwide, 800,000 bypass surgeries are done each year with 400,000 in the United States. Doctors believe the surgery knocks loose tiny bits of fatty deposits that then float in the bloodstream until they block the small vessels of the brain, starving it of oxygen.

Dr. Philip Wolf, of Boston University, a stroke specialist not involved in the study, called the degree of brain damage “ a gross underestimation, because these people were not seen systematically by a neurologist. It must be the tip of the iceberg.” ▲

■ Bypass Surgery Can Increase Stroke Risk

A study in the July 17, 2001 issue of *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association* finds that patients who have heart bypass surgery soon after having a heart attack or an episode of severe chest pain may have an increased chance of having a stroke in the following months.

More than 18,000 patients who had heart-related chest pain called unstable angina or a less severe form of heart attack called a non-Q-wave heart attack were studied. Patients who had heart bypass surgery within 2 weeks of either of these episodes occurring were, on average, four times as likely to have a stroke as patients who did not have bypass surgery at all. The risk was even higher in elderly patients and those with a past history of stroke, diabetes and high heart rates.