**Mountain Living More Heart-Friendly, Study Suggests**

March 15, 2005 |By [Sarah Graham](http://www.scientificamerican.com/author/sarah-graham)

  
  
Living in the mountains may provide benefits beyond a picturesque view. The results of a new study indicate that mountain dwellers live longer than their lowland counterparts, perhaps because their hearts get a better work out on a day-to-day basis.

Greece has one of the lowest death rates from heart disease and other causes among industrialized nations. Nikos Baibas of the University of Athens Medical School and his colleagues tracked the health of 1,150 people living in three different villages within 200 kilometers of Athens--Arahova, Zevgolatio and Aidonia--over a 15-year period. The study participants all had similar daily activities because the predominant livelihoods for both men and women are the same in all three villages. But whereas Arahova is located 950 meters above sea level, Zevgolatio and Aidonia are located in the plains. The researchers collected information about general health and potential risk factors at the beginning of the study and subjects submitted blood samples as well. According to a report published in the April issue of the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health,* at the end of the study period the residents of the mountain village had lower overall death rates and lower cardiovascular death rates than the lowland residents did, despite initially testing higher for both circulating blood lipids and blood pressure. The beneficial effect of mountain-dwelling was more pronounced among men, the team reports.

Living at higher altitudes, with their lower-oxygen environments, can induce physiological changes in the body. "Residence in mountainous areas seems to have a protective effect from total and coronary mortality," the authors conclude. They suggest that the increased physical activity from walking on rugged terrain with less oxygen in the surrounding air could explain their findings.