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Felicite Tomlinson: Cardiologist Explains Why A 'Healthy' 18-Year-Old Could Die From A Sudden Heart Attack

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[Marissa Charles](#) and [Jenna Lemoncelli](#)

Louis Tomlinson's sister died of a 'heart attack' on March 13, at just 18. But, why would a young person who was seemingly healthy die that way so suddenly? Two top cardiologists explain.

One Direction fans were stunned on March 14 when news broke that [Louis Tomlinson's](#) 18-year-old sister **Felicite** had [suddenly collapsed and died](#) in her London apartment the day before. The 27-year-old singer's reps told **HollywoodLife** that the teen died of a "heart attack."

While officials in London are waiting for a post-mortem to confirm Felicite's cause of death, we spoke to two top cardiologists to find out what could have happened to Felicite. The social media influencer's shocking death comes just days after former Miss Teen Universe, **Lotte van der Zee** [passed away at 20](#) after suffering a sudden cardiac arrest the day before her birthday. Her parents announced the news on March 7. Like Felicite, Lotte seemed healthy and active before dropping dead. In fact, she was on a ski trip with her family in Westendorf, Austria when she collapsed.

[Dr. Reed Wilson](#), a Beverly Hills GP and cardiologist, and **Tanya Dutta** MD, director of echocardiography at Westchester Medical Center in New York explained why Felicite could have died of a condition so often associated with people much older.

HL: Is it common for young people, especially someone aged 18, to suffer from a heart attack?

Dr. Wilson: “Heart attacks are rare in young people, therefore exact statistics as to each cause are difficult.” Dr. Dutta agrees that “it is uncommon for someone to have a heart attack at such a young age.”

HL: What could cause a heart attack at such a young age?

Dr. Dutta: “The term heart attack is sometimes used generically to indicate death resulting from a heart problem. In an older population, usually this is due to coronary artery disease or plaque in the blood vessels of the heart. In a [younger] person, this may be due to pre-existing structural abnormalities in the heart or due to electrical abnormalities in the heart.”

Dr. Wilson explains further: “A heart attack is caused by a blocked artery to the heart. The part of the heart that is supplied by the blood vessel dies and no longer pumps. If the area is small enough the individual can do very well. If it is a large area and there is no longer enough heart to pump, the patient can die. The most common deadly problem following a heart attack is abnormal heart beats that result in deadly arrhythmias and ultimately cardiac arrest where in the heart stops.”



Louis

Tomlinson's sister Felicite collapsed and died in London on March 13. His reps say that a 'heart attack' killed her. (Splash News)

HL: There were reportedly no warning signs. Could there have been something from birth or a defect that went undetected?

Dr. Wilson: "Some young adults can be born with abnormalities of the coronary arteries that can lead to sudden death. The heart has two arteries, a right and a left (the left immediately splits into two). But some individuals have just one that supplies the whole heart, while others have arteries that travel in strange directions to get to the heart. Both of these can lead to heart attacks." Dr Dutta confirms that an undetected birth defect "is always possible."

Dr. Wilson continues with his explanation: "**Pete Maravich**, one of the greatest college basketball players to have lived, died suddenly at age 40. He passed away [in 1988] while playing a pickup basketball game. An autopsy revealed that he had a single right coronary artery and no left coronary artery. As a result the right wrapped all the way around his heart in an abnormal course."

"Some young adults, more often women, can have increased clotting going on in their body. A clot can go to the heart, leading to the blood flow being blocked and a heart attack results. If it goes to the brain, a stroke results. Taking birth control can worsen this risk in some individuals."

"Some young adults have a genetic risk of very high cholesterol. Obviously, these individuals are markedly at risk for blockage of the coronary arteries from plaque build-up starting at a young age. Another rare cause is spasm of the coronary arteries. The arteries actually have muscle tissue in them and in some individuals these arteries are found to spasm and this can temporarily block the blood flow to the heart. Other rare causes are people who develop inflammation of the coronary arteries. This also can result in blockage of blood flow."

Dr. Dutta adds: "There are also some genetic conditions that show up in early adulthood."



Felicite with her famous brother Louis Tomlinson on a day out in London in September 2018. (Splash News)

HL: There is no indication that drugs were a factor in this particular case, but have you seen cases of heart attacks in young people due to drug use or overdose?

Dr. Wilson: “Drugs can cause problems with the heart and result in blockage of the coronary arteries, usually through spasm. These include cocaine, amphetamines and other drugs. Sometimes young men using steroids can have heart attacks through multiple mechanisms.”

HL: What steps can a person take to prevent a heart attack?

Dr. Wilson: “Obviously you cannot prevent a birth abnormality, but you can be screened. Another very important thing is to not smoke. Smoking really increases your risk for a heart attack at a young age. Also, don’t use recreational drugs that may increase your risk, you never know what they can do to you. America is getting fatter and this really is a problem [in increasing the] risk factor for heart disease.”

HL: What are the warning signs that you, or someone you love may be having a heart attack?

Dr. Wilson: “The most common warning signs of a heart attack are chest pain or discomfort, shortness of breath, pain in the arms, neck or jaw, and nausea, lightheadedness and sweating. Sometimes people think they have gastric reflux when it’s actually their heart.”