



Stress and Heart Disease

How does stress impact your heart health?

Source: American Heart Association (www.heart.org)

According to the American Heart Association, there is no direct link between stress and heart disease. However, stress, particularly constant (chronic) stress, can negatively affect your health and can cause issues relating to your heart.

Stress releases adrenaline, causing heart rate and blood pressure to rise

Stress sets off a chain of events. First, you have a stressful situation that's usually upsetting but not harmful. The body reacts to it by releasing a hormone, adrenaline, which causes your breathing and heart rate to speed up and your blood pressure to rise. These physical reactions prepare you to deal with the situation by confronting it or by running away from it --- the "fight or flight" response.

Avoid feelings of anger, hostility that cause heart rate, blood pressure to rise

Since the early 1970's, doctors have used the term "Type A" personality or behavior to describe a person who is always in a hurry, impatient, often irritated, angry or hostile, and who strives for perfection. Recent studies show that the Type A traits linked to heart disease probably are anger and hostility. Why? When you are angry or hostile, your body releases stress hormones into your blood, causing your heart rate and blood pressure to go up temporarily, and making your heart work harder.

Learn to manage stress through relaxation, stress management techniques

Medicines are helpful for many things, but usually not for stress. Some people take tranquilizers to calm them down, but it's far better to learn to manage your stress through relaxation or stress management techniques. Be careful not to confuse stress with anxiety. If you suffer from severe anxiety, speak with your doctor about whether you need medication.

Coping with Anxiety

Do you often feel restless and worried? This is anxiety, another common feeling. When you're anxious you may feel nervous, tense and irritable and trouble sleeping. Anxiety that lasts for weeks can wear you out emotionally and physically. Sometimes anxiety comes up suddenly as a "panic attack". During a panic attack, you may feel fearful or short of breath or have irregular heartbeats, chest pain or feel sweaty.

Tips:

- Share your anxieties with a family member, friends or healthcare provider. Even if you don't know what's causing your anxiety, talking about it may help.
- Enjoy physical activity. Go for a walk, ride a bicycle or take a swim. Being active can help take your mind off worries and releases endorphins that make you feel better.
- Take time to relax and do things that make you happy.
- Don't try to reduce your anxiety with harmful habits, such as drinking alcohol or taking sleeping pills. Self-medicating can have dangerous interactions with your heart medicines and can make your condition worse.

If you're still anxious or are having panic attacks, talk to a health care professional. He or she can recommend treatment, perhaps including anti-anxiety medications.



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