

# Managing Stress and Heart Disease

Stress may impact your heart health. When you know that you have heart disease, it is more important than ever to get in control of your stress.

Chronic stress can weaken your immune system, lead to poor eating habits and weight gain, increase heart rate, increase blood pressure and in turn may damage the artery walls.

*"I had gone into hypertension, high blood pressure and I had ignored all the symptoms I was having."*

Many of the ways people cope with stress, like overeating, drinking and smoking, can also contribute to worsening cardiovascular disease and increase your risk of a new or second heart attack or stroke.

Some signs of stress include disturbance in sleeping habits. If you suffer from sleep apnea and don't use a mask every night - your blood pressure can go up and down in patterns that can cause damage.

If you are eating too little or too much, have constant headaches, tension in the neck, shoulders, back or chest, or the inability to relax or enjoy yourself - these are signs of stress that need to be managed for your health.

Of course, no one can totally avoid stress in life, but taking small steps can make big progress in your health.

*"I think for women especially, we're doing 10 things at once and we always put ourselves last."*

Whether it's something serious like the death of a loved one or managing a chronic illness every day, or an everyday mishap like getting stuck in traffic or your power going off in the middle of the night, it is important to find healthy ways to manage your stress.

Stick to your routine: be sure to get enough rest and to take your medications, make healthy food choices, and exercise as usual.

If you find yourself in the same stressful situation day in and day out, make a change to reduce that stress. Your health depends on it.

Try to include time in each day to relax.

Relaxing hobbies can help you keep things in perspective and refocus on what's important. Try reading, listening to music, or meditation.

It's a good idea to know a few relaxation techniques. Your cardiac care team can give you information on a variety, such as muscle relaxation or deep breathing exercises; yoga, or biofeedback.

*"I do breathing yoga, and I do meditation, and that sort of helps me. If I get myself into a stressful situation I take a few deep breaths and I kind of say "Well, you know, everything going to be fine."*

Whichever relaxation technique you choose, try to make it a regular part of your day-to-day living.

One of the best ways to cope with stress is to get support. Communicate with your family and friends. Talk to them about the emotions you are feeling.

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Community groups can help you express your feelings and learn from others.

And some find prayer can offer help.

If you are concerned that stress may be affecting your cardiovascular health, talk to your healthcare provider about ways to reduce the stress in your life.