

Healthy Living After a Heart Attack: Reducing Stress

Everyone experiences stress at some point, but after a heart attack, too much stress may keep you from making the heart-healthy lifestyle changes you should.

Stress can lead you to risky behaviors, like drinking too much alcohol, drug use, overeating, eating unhealthy foods, not exercising or using tobacco.,

These behaviors can increase your risk for high blood pressure, heart disease and heart attack.

Stress affects your body by triggering the “fight or flight” response. When you are stressed, your body releases adrenaline and other stress hormones.

These hormones affect many organs, including the heart. Over time, being on constant “high alert” can cause health problems.

Although everyone experiences and responds to stress differently, there are positive steps you can take to reduce your stress levels.

These include getting regular physical activity, maintaining a positive attitude, having a strong social support network, avoiding too much caffeine, and making healthy food choices.

Exercise in particular has a positive effect on stress. Getting some moderate physical activity every day, or every other day, can help relieve stress and anxiety, in addition to other health benefits.,

Ask your healthcare provider about safe levels of physical activity before beginning a new program.

If you are stressed about having another heart attack, it can help to talk to a therapist or counselor.

If you don't have a therapist, ask your healthcare provider about finding someone who can help.

“When I get home my family really-- they recognize the position that I’m in. They recognize sometimes that I’m tired, sometimes they tell me you need to just go sit down somewhere or go lay down. And I appreciate that.”

Other techniques to control stress include meditation, relaxation therapy, and other stress management techniques.

“There are medications that have indications for such conditions as well as increasing your exercise regimen and increasing your hobbies may benefit in decreasing these stressful situations.”

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If you feel like your stress is overwhelming and affecting your day to day life, you may be experiencing anxiety.

A therapist or your healthcare provider can work with you to treat anxiety. In addition to making changes in your day-to-day life, there are medicines that can help relieve anxiety.

Stress is a normal reaction to difficult situations.

Taking positive steps to reduce your stress will not only reduce your risk of having another heart attack, it can have profound health benefits in all areas of your life.

“I’ve learned to calm down and take every day for what it is and learn to just enjoy being here and not necessarily needing to be running all the time and needing to have that chaos in my life.”