



STRESS AND HEART HEALTH

What's stressful for one person may not be for another.

Everyone feels and reacts to stress in different ways. How much stress you experience and how you react to it can lead to a wide variety of health problems — and that's why it's critical to know what you can do about it.

STRESS, MENTAL HEALTH, AND YOUR HEART

Mental health can positively or negatively impact your physical health and risk factors for heart disease and stroke, and so there is Psychological Health, Well-Being, and the Mind-Heart-Body Connection.

Stress may contribute to poor health behaviors linked to increased risk for heart disease and stroke, such as:

- Smoking
- Overeating
- Lack of physical activity
- Unhealthy diet
- Being overweight
- Not taking medications as prescribed

Your body's response to stress may be:

- A headache
- Back strain
- Stomach pains

Stress can also:

- Diminish your energy
- Wreak havoc on your sleep
- Make you feel cranky, forgetful, or out of control

A stressful situation can set off a chain of events. Your body releases adrenaline, a hormone that temporarily causes your breathing and heart rate to speed up and your blood pressure to rise. These reactions prepare you to deal with the situation — the “fight or flight” response.

What is chronic stress?

Chronic stress is when stress is constant, and your body is in high gear off and on for days or weeks at a time. Chronic stress may lead to high blood pressure, which can increase risk for heart attack and stroke.

Can managing stress reduce or prevent heart disease?

Managing stress is good for your health and well-being. Negative psychological health / mental health is associated with an increased risk of heart disease and stroke. But positive psychological health is associated with a lower risk of heart disease and death.

Negative mental health conditions include:

- Depression
- Chronic stress
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Pessimism
- Dissatisfaction with life

These conditions are associated with potentially harmful responses in our bodies such as:

- Irregular heart rate and rhythm
- Increased digestive problems
- Increased blood pressure
- Inflammation
- Reduced blood flow to the heart

Positive mental health characteristics include:

- Happiness
- Optimism
- Gratitude
- Sense of purpose, life satisfaction
- Mindfulness



People with positive mental health are also more likely to have health factors linked to a lower risk of developing heart disease:

- Lower blood pressure
- Better glucose control
- Less inflammation
- Lower cholesterol

What can I do about stress?

Fortunately, you can manage stress:

- Exercising regularly. It can relieve stress, tension, anxiety, and depression. Consider a nature walk, meditation or yoga
- Making time for friends and family. It's important to maintain social connections and talk with people you trust
- Getting enough sleep. Adults should aim for seven to nine hours a night
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Practicing relaxation techniques while listening to music
- Finding a stimulating hobby that can be fun and distract you from negative thoughts or worries

Figuring out how stress pushes your buttons is an important step in dealing with it. Identify sources of stress in your life and look for ways to reduce and manage them. A health care professional can help you find ways to manage your stress.

Stress management or relaxation classes can also help. Look for them at community colleges, rehab programs, in hospitals or by calling a therapist in your community.

Adopting serenity in the face of life's challenges may help improve your perception of stress and result in better quality of life and heart health.

