



You Can!

Manage Emotions for
Better Heart Health
February is American Heart Month



What the Research Shows

Science suggests an association among stress, depression, and heart disease. Several studies strongly suggest that grief, depression, and job loss can contribute to heart attack and cardiac arrest. Stress may affect risk factors for heart disease such as high blood pressure. Stress may also affect behaviors that increase risk such as smoking, overeating, drinking too much alcohol, and physical inactivity. Managing and treating these conditions is important to reduce your overall health risk.

Stress and Your Reactions

You can manage stress in both healthy and unhealthy ways. Unfortunately, many people deal with stress by smoking, drinking too much, and overeating. All of these unhealthy habits can contribute to heart disease. But using healthy ways to keep your stress under control allows you to better protect yourself against heart disease. Try these ideas:

- **Exercise.** When you are anxious and tense, exercise is a great way to burn off all that excess energy and stress. Go for a walk, or go to a senior center or YMCA and try an exercise class. Plan to exercise for 30 to 40 minutes, 4 to 5 days a week to relieve stress and improve your heart health.
- **Breathe deeply.** The meditative, deep breathing done in yoga is calming and relieves stress, especially if you do it regularly. There are also relaxation and meditation videos and CDs available at your local library or online.
- **Take a break.** When your stress level rises, spend a few quiet moments alone, read a short story, or listen to your favorite music. Cultivate gratitude. Make a list of what you're grateful for in your life to focus on the positives.
- **Get together with friends.** Create some weekly rituals with your friends, or make new friends by joining a book group or other activity. Research suggests that people with frequent social connections enjoy better protection against high blood pressure.

Research is ongoing to look more closely at the link between emotional health and heart health. But the existing evidence is consistent enough to prove that you should take its potential effects on your heart seriously. Exercise regularly and keep your emotional health in check, and you'll build a stronger buffer against heart disease.

Source: <https://ahealthyme.com> (BC/BS of MA)

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