

Stress and Your Heart



CARDIOVASCULAR
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WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress refers to the body's response to change. Not all stress is bad.

The most important thing is to manage stress properly. People often feel stress in response to job troubles, arguments with family or friends, or social isolation.

All people feel stress sometimes. But people react to stress in different ways. For example, some people might feel a lot of stress when driving, while others might find driving relaxing.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE STRESS?

Common signs of stress include:

- Unusual sleeping patterns, such as an inability to sleep or a need to sleep too much.
- Mood swings
- Crying frequently
- Lack of energy
- Unusual eating patterns, such as eating too much or a loss of appetite
- Feeling angry, afraid, nervous, or helpless

continues

HOW DOES STRESS AFFECT MY HEART?

Stress can have several effects on your body. When you are under stress, your muscles tense, your blood pressure rises, and your heart beats faster. These effects make your heart work harder.

Research shows that there is a link between the risk of developing heart disease and the factors that often cause stress. However, no one knows if stress directly causes heart disease. Still, stress may cause other known risk factors for heart disease, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, overeating, and lack of exercise.

Stress is a bigger concern for people who already have heart disease. People with existing heart disease may experience chest pain when they are under stress. Also, if you have clogged arteries, your heart may not get the extra blood it needs during stress. This can cause an inadequate amount of oxygen in your heart.

HOW CAN I LOWER MY STRESS?

It makes sense to control your stress. You can lower your stress by:

- Taking a deep breath. This helps your muscle relax
- Closing your eyes and resting
- Thinking of relaxing things
- Exercising
- Taking a walk
- Eating right—limit foods with fat, sugar, and salt
- Talking to a friend about your troubles
- Changing the things that cause you stress
- Changing your outlook. Focus on the positive things in your life!

Ask your health care team or doctor for suggestions about how to manage your stress.