

American Heart Month

by M. Scott Stanley, MS

Hear disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, resulting in nearly 700,000 deaths each year (or 29% of all deaths), and is a major cause of disability. There are a number of heart-related conditions, but Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) is by far the most common type, resulting in 71% of all heart disease-related deaths. Due to the buildup of fatty plaques, this condition is marked by a hardening and narrowing of the coronary arteries which supply blood to the heart muscle. This buildup is known as atherosclerosis. As a result of atherosclerosis, the blood flow and oxygen supply to the heart is diminished or blocked off completely, eventually leading to a heart attack or complete heart failure. CHD can also lead to other serious problems such as blood clots, angina (chest pain), and arrhythmias (irregular heart beat). The following are risk factors for heart disease:

- » High cholesterol – your fasting total cholesterol should be <200 mg/dL, your HDL (“good”) cholesterol should be >40 mg/dL, and your LDL (“bad”) cholesterol should be <100 mg/dL.
- » High triglycerides – your fasting triglycerides should be <150 mg/dL.
- » High blood pressure – your blood pressure should be <120/80 mmHg.
- » Diabetes mellitus – your fasting blood glucose should be <100 mg/dL.
- » Other risk factors include family history of heart disease, lack of physical activity, excessive alcohol use, tobacco use, diets low in fruits and vegetables and/or high in fat and cholesterol, and being overweight/obese.

Although heart disease is extremely deadly, there is much you can do to reduce your chance of developing heart disease:

- » Do not use tobacco products
- » Drink alcohol in moderation
- » Maintain a healthy weight
- » Get 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity 3-5 days per week

- » Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, dietary fiber, and foods containing healthy fats (e.g. fish, nuts, olive oil, etc.)
- » Limit the amounts of total fat, trans fat, saturated fat, processed/refined sugars, cholesterol, and salt in your diet
- » See your physician annually if possible to have your cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood glucose tested
- » If you are at high risk, discuss the topic of aspirin therapy with your physician

It is estimated that 47% of cardiac deaths occur before emergency services arrive or before arrival to a hospital, thus it is very important to know the major signs and symptoms of a heart attack and call 9-1-1 immediately:

- » Chest discomfort in the form of an uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain in the center of the chest
- » Discomfort in other areas of the upper body, such as the arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- » Shortness of breath
- » Other symptoms such as cold sweat, nausea, or lightheadedness

By changing to a healthier lifestyle and knowing the signs of a heart attack, you can greatly reduce your chances of developing heart disease, and increase your chances of surviving a heart attack should it occur and leading a longer, healthier life.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

When you need help, call Symmetry Wellness at 419.475.5338 or 1.800.422.5338. It's free and confidential.

Balancing Productivity & Life's Challenges

Managing Stress - 7 Tips to Curb Anxiety

by Brian D. Johnson

We can't always avoid all of the things that cause stress in our lives, but managing stress is a skill that each of us should work on in order to live a happier, more fulfilling life. Below are seven tips that I've found to be helpful in getting ahead of stress and anxiety:

Keep Your Finances in Order

Money worries are one of the universal causes of stress and anxiety in peoples' lives. When you get your finances under control, you will have eliminated a great deal of potential stress in your day to day life. A great start would be to create a budget. Of course, you'll need to stick with it, but if you do it will be a big help in eliminating surprises. Also, when creating your budget, remember to set aside some of your pay for savings. Some type of savings is important to take care of those unexpected things that life throws at us that can then lead to chaos (and stress).

Prioritize

Everything doesn't have to be done NOW. Make a list of all of the tasks you have to complete. Label each task: A) important and urgent; B) important but not urgent; C) unimportant.

Cross all of the "C" items off of your list.

Delegate the "A" and "B" items where possible and practical. This could be as easy as asking a friend or relative to give you a hand.

Focus your attention on the "A" items. Your list should be much smaller and more manageable than when you started.

Seek Solitude

Get away from the stress. Sometimes this can be as easy as stepping outside for a while. A quiet soak in the bath tub can also often help. The main thing is to distance yourself and give your mind a chance to recharge. I find that 20 minutes in my hammock watching the clouds will usually reset my stress meter.

Simplify

Consolidate tasks or errands whenever possible. Clean up clutter in your home or office. Often when you look hard at all of the things you're keeping, you'll find that there's really no reason to hang on to many of them.

Even for things like holiday planning, you can find ways to simplify. For example, if you're entertaining for the holidays, instead of trying to provide a full bar, just stick with one drink type plus beer and wine. This way, batches of the drink can be made up, and the guests can serve themselves.

Just Say No

This goes right along with the previous tip. Although it can be hard, sometimes you just have to tell someone that your plate is full. Another way to say no while still being accommodating would be to say something like, "I can help with that, but I won't be able to start until next week" (or whenever you could actually start the task). This will let the other person know that you're willing but that you are already stretched as thin as you can handle.

Sleep

Most people require a minimum of eight uninterrupted hours of sleep per night in order to function at 100%. If you're trying to squeeze by on less, you're limiting your productivity and making it harder for your brain to deal with the little snags that life throws at you.

Exercise

Exercise is one thing you should do every day, no matter how full your day is. If your schedule is extremely tight, park a little further out in parking lots, take the stairs, and go for a short walk at lunch time. These things might not have the full health benefits of a more serious exercise routine, but anything that gets your heart pumping will also help clear your mind.

When we're feeling stressed, all of our problems seem huge and insurmountable. So when managing stress, remember to break things down into small pieces, and if you'll then try to follow the above tips, you'll find that you can handle your stress much easier.

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For more information on managing stress of any kind, please visit Zap-Stress.com and download Brian's free report on ways to start today living a stress-free life. You can also subscribe to Brian's weekly newsletter that's full of tips and advice on different techniques and methods to manage stress.

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