

Emotions and Heart Disease

In the past 40 years, cases of heart disease in the U.S. have dropped by 20 percent.¹ Now, that's news worth celebrating! Efforts at prevention, detection, and treatment appear to be paying off. For example, Americans' cholesterol levels keep falling. Researchers think that ditching trans fats from our diets may be one reason why.²

Still, heart disease here remains the number-one cause of death in both men and women.² We can do so much more to support our faithful tickers. You might be surprised to learn how much your emotional health influences your heart. Check out a few recent studies:

Pessimism. A study lasting 11 years looked at the risks linked to pessimism among 3,000 men and women. And guess what? That "glass-half-empty" attitude seemed to have a pretty big impact. Those who were most pessimistic were twice as likely to die of heart disease as the least pessimistic. The researchers can't prove that negativity caused the rise in heart-related deaths. But this emotion *can* lead to an increase in hormones related to stress and inflammation. And, that might help explain the link.³

Worry. An even larger study of 7,000 Norwegians also found a link between worrying about a heart attack and actually having one. The "worried well" were twice as likely to have a heart attack as those who weren't anxious about their health. Again, the link can't be proven, but physical changes from anxiety are the likely culprit.⁴

Depression. Over 10 years, researchers tracked 1,100 women and found that those with a history of depression had a much higher risk of heart disease. In fact, in women younger than 65 with no history of heart problems, depression was the only significant risk factor linked with developing heart disease. Depression can produce stress hormones. But it may also lead to unhealthy behaviors that can increase the risks.⁵

Anger. Either intense anger or physical exertion doubles the odds of having a first heart attack. Even worse? Combining the two triples that risk, according to a study of 12,000 people. Chances are, anger and intense activity simply trigger an attack in

people who already have artery-clogging plaques, say the researchers. Intense emotions or activity may cause a domino effect: A rise in blood pressure and heart rate constricts blood vessels. That, in turn, causes plaques to rupture and cut off blood flow to the heart.⁶

Spotting any trends, anyone?

With medical help or even self-care such as meditation or relaxation exercises, you can learn how to shift some of these moods. If these emotions are a challenge for you, I'll also do what I can to help. For one thing, I can point you to reliable sources of health information. Together we can work on managing blood pressure including discussing a few changes to your diet and lifestyle. Review the signs of a heart attack and make an appointment with your doctor today to know your overall health.

Nothing herein constitutes medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, or is a substitute for professional advice. You should always seek the advice of your physician or other medical professional if you have questions or concerns about a medical condition.

Sources:

1. HealthDay: U.S. Heart Disease Rates Fell 20 Percent Since 1980s: Study. Available at: https://medlineplus.gov/news/fullstory_162007.html Accessed 1-3-17.
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3. HealthDay: Pessimism May Take Unwelcome Toll on the Heart. Available at: https://medlineplus.gov/news/fullstory_162083.html Accessed 1-3-17.
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5. Women's Brain Health Initiative: Depression Can Fuel Heart Disease in Midlife Women: Available at: <http://womensbrainhealth.org/think-twice/depression-can-fuel-heart-disease-in-midlife-women> Accessed 1-4-17.
6. HealthDay: Anger, Heavy Exertion: Fast Track to a Heart Attack? Available at: https://medlineplus.gov/news/fullstory_161395.html Accessed 1-4-17.