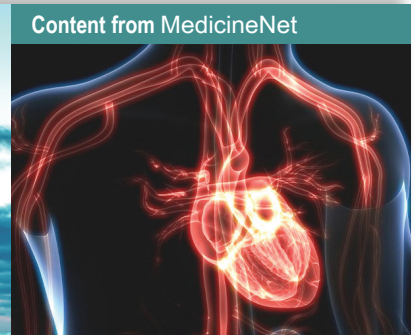


STRESS MAY BE YOUR WORST ENEMY

RECENT STUDIES SHOW STRESS-RELATED DISORDERS CAN RAISE RISKS OF HEART ATTACKS BY 34%, STROKES BY 75% AND HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE MORE THAN 100%



Content from MedicineNet



If you do not manage your chronic stress, you can put a strain on your heart and that can lead to physical problems that increase the risk of heart disease

How can stress and anxiety damage your heart?

Stress is a normal part of life. But if left unmanaged, chronic stress can strain your heart and lead to physical problems that increase the risk of heart disease, including:

- High blood pressure
- Chest pains
- Irregular heartbeats

Medical researchers are not exactly sure how stress increases the

risk of heart disease. You can make other risk factors worse such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure if you have high levels of stress. For example, if you are under stress, your blood pressure will go up, you may overeat, exercise less, and be more likely to smoke. Sleep deprivation caused by anxiety raises cortisol levels, and high cortisol levels have been linked to high blood sugar and weight gain, which are also risk factors for heart disease.

Suppose stress itself is a risk factor for heart disease. In that case, it could be because chronic stress exposes your body to unhealthy,



persistently elevated levels of stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. Studies also link stress to changes in the way [blood clots](#), which increases the risk of a [heart attack](#).

Studies suggest that emotionally stressful and traumatic events have a negative impact on the mind and damage the heart. A recent study reported that stress-related disorders can raise the risk of [heart attacks](#) by 34%, [stroke](#) by 75%, and [high blood pressure](#) by more than 100%.

In some cases, you may not be able to notice the effects of stress on your heart. Even serious diseases such as [high blood pressure](#), excessive hormone production, high [cholesterol](#), and [diabetes](#), may cause few to no symptoms. However, their long-term impact can cause significant damage to your health.

■ How do I know if stress is affecting my heart?

When you are exposed to long stretches of stress, your body gives warning signals that something is wrong. These physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral warning signs should not be ignored. They tell you that you need to slow down. If you continue to be stressed and you don't give your body a break, you are likely to develop health problems like heart disease. You could also worsen an existing illness.

Warning signs and symptoms of stress

Physical signs	Dizziness, general aches, and pains, grinding teeth, clenched jaws, headaches, indigestion, muscle tension, difficulty sleeping, racing heart, ringing in the ears, stooped posture, sweaty palms, tiredness, exhaustion, trembling, weight gain or loss, upset stomach
Mental signs	Constant worry, difficulty making decisions, forgetfulness, inability to concentrate, lack of creativity, loss of sense of humor, poor memory
Emotional signs	Anger, anxiety, crying, depression, feeling powerless, frequent mood swings, irritability, loneliness, negative thinking, nervousness, sadness
Behavioral signs	Bossiness, compulsive eating, critical attitude of others, explosive actions, frequent job changes, impulsive actions, increased use of alcohol or drugs, withdrawal from relationships or social situations

Learn to Relax and Sleep Well

Medical Author: Melissa Conrad Stöppler, MD

Medical Editor: Dennis Lee, MD

We are born with the inclination to relax and sleep when our bodies or minds need a break. Over the years, it becomes necessary to curb and even control these natural urges to rest, since we must stay alert as we attend school, learn professions, go to work, or care for a family. Many people spend years conditioning themselves to perform well despite feeling tired. Although no one would disagree that suppressing tiredness can be a necessary skill, it can impair our ability to actually “let go” and relax when we do find the time.

Relaxation can also be a uniquely individual activity. Napping or just doing nothing might be your idea of rest and relaxation, but this amount of inactivity might drive someone else crazy. Others may relax by participating in sports or undertaking physical challenges, but some people would find these activities stressful. Whatever your idea is of relaxation, the following tips can help you retrain and regain some of those lost relaxation skills...

[Get tips for stress relief](#)

■ Can emotional stress cause a heart attack?

Due to the strain on the heart, chronic stress can cause a heart attack.

However, in some cases, stress can cause stress-induced [cardiomyopathy](#). With this condition, the heart can be physically overtaken by extreme emotions ([grief](#), terror, or rage) which causes a flood of stress hormones in the body, triggering symptoms that mimic a heart attack or [heart failure](#).

Symptoms of stress [cardiomyopathy](#) include:

- Acute [chest pain](#)
- [Shortness of breath](#)
- [Perspiration \(sweating\)](#)
- Rapid heartbeats
- [Dizziness](#)

In most cases, the symptoms are temporary. With treatment, complete recovery of [heart function](#) can be

achieved within a few weeks. However, it can be fatal in rare cases.

Does stress affect everyone the same?

Stress affects everyone differently.

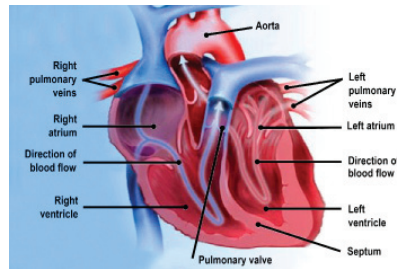
Even if women have a lower risk of developing heart diseases, especially during their reproductive ages, studies suggest that stress raises the risk of coronary [heart disease in women](#) by 21%.

How to calm your heart

Reducing stress can be beneficial to your heart and protect you from other diseases associated with stress. Lifestyle changes can help calm your heart and reduce stress:

- **Exercise:** Regular [aerobic exercise](#) can reduce stress, regulate mood, and enhance [sleep](#). Try to get at least 30 minutes of exercise three times a week.
- **Eat healthy:** When you are stressed, it can be tempting to reach for comfort foods high in fat. However, junk food can make you feel worse and can increase your risk of heart disease. Avoid refined [sugar](#), processed meat, and [caffeine](#), and opt for fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- **Do something you enjoy:** Find ways to engage in activities you enjoy that relax you and help you stay positive. Think about things like gardening, drawing, socializing, volunteering, and other hobbies are all great ways to relieve unwanted stress.
- **Spend time with loved ones:** Having a social network has been linked to decreased stress levels, which leads to improved heart health.
- **Practice [yoga](#) or meditation:** Yoga and meditation blend physical and mental exercises which can help you to calm your mind and relax your body, which can have important health benefits.

— Medical Illustrations —

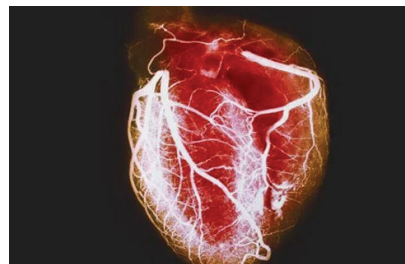


Stress and Heart Disease

Detailed medical images of the heart plus a medical gallery of human anatomy and physiology

[See Images](#)

— Medical Sideshow Article —

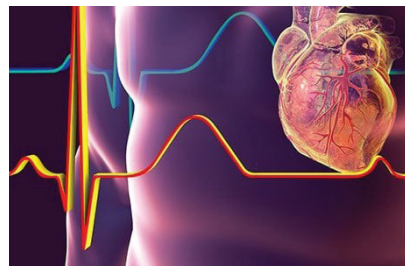


Heart Disease

Understanding how the heart works. Symptoms, signs and causes

[See Slideshow](#)

Medical Quiz



Stress and Heart Disease

In the United States one in every four deaths is caused by heart disease

[See Quiz](#)