

Lowering Stress for Cardiovascular Health



You can lower your risk for heart disease by learning to lower your stress. People cope with stress in many ways. Some may eat unhealthy foods, overeat, smoke, or drink alcohol. But all of these can increase heart health risks. Stress can also cause a short-term rise in blood pressure and heart rate.

The next time you feel stress, look at what's bothering you. Is it a small problem you can let go of? If it's a big problem, you can talk it out with family or friends, or a counselor or therapist. Stay close to the supportive people in your life. They can help you work through and manage the stress in life.



Learning ways to relax

To reduce stress, practice daily relaxation. Here are a few ideas:

- Make time for yourself each day to read a book, listen to music, watch the sunset, or do anything that makes you feel calm and peaceful.
- Use your favorite kind of exercise as a way to release tension.
- Practice time management. This means giving yourself enough time to get things done.
- Keep your sense of humor. If you can laugh at yourself and the things that happen each day, you'll stay happier and healthier.
- Try deep breathing or meditation. Many libraries and bookstores have audio files or CDs that may help you relax.
- Imagine stress away. When you're feeling stress, stop what you're doing. Imagine a peaceful scene. Think about a warm beach or rolling green hills, for example.

- Identify what triggers stress for you. Plan ahead to avoid or prepare for those triggers.
- Limit situations with relatives or friends that can turn into arguments and stressful encounters.
- Practice letting go of small issues that cause you stress.
- Find ways to remind yourself to use your stress-coping resources when you feel your stress levels rising.
- If you need more help and ideas, join a support group. Sharing problems with others can help you handle stress.

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