

Psychosocial Factors

Researchers have been examining the role that psychosocial factors plays in preventing heart disease for nearly half a century. They have found that certain adverse psychosocial factors such as depression, social isolation, chronic anger and certain kinds of anxiety affect both people's behaviors and the body itself.



There are many ways in which psychosocial factors are related to heart disease. It is suggested that people with adverse psychosocial factors may be more likely to live an unhealthy lifestyle. For example, they may overeat, not exercise, and smoke in order to cope with negative feelings. These behaviors can increase the risk of developing heart disease. In addition, excess, chronic overstimulation of the sympathetic nervous system – the “fight or flight response” – may predispose people to develop plaque in their coronary arteries. This response may also trigger plaque rupture, which is the main cause of heart attack.

Successful management of psychosocial factors may lead to better overall health and the prevention of heart disease.

Tips for Managing Feelings of Depression, Social Isolation and Anger:

- Recognize the warning signs. The two major symptoms of depression are:
 - Depressed mood - feeling sad, blue, or unhappy much of the time
 - Loss of interest in activities that used to bring you pleasure
- Discuss and develop ways to manage negative psychosocial factors with your doctor.
- If you have had a cardiac event and suffer from depression ask your doctor for a referral to a qualified mental health specialist for medication and/or psychotherapy.
- Allow yourself more personal time during the day to reflect, relax, and breathe. Many of us live hectic, busy lives and neglect our need for personal time, leading to chronic feelings of being stressed. Everyone deserves some down time.

This resource provides brief, general information about this health care topic. It does not take the place of the instructions you receive from your health care providers. Discuss the risks and benefits of therapies with your doctor and always take medication as prescribed. For answers to other questions talk to your health care provider.

For more information or a referral, please call the NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital Preventive Cardiology Program at (212) 305-4866 or visit our website at:

<http://www.hearthealthtimes.com>.



- Surround yourself with supportive family members or friends whom you can talk to when you feel stressed, angry, depressed, or isolated.
- Find a support group, such as those organized by the American Heart Association or your local hospital.

Goals:

- Talk to your doctor about feelings of depression, social isolation, anger or anxiety.
- If possible, join a support group if you suffer from any of these conditions.

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