



HEART Health



Stress & Your Heart Health

How do you react to a stressful situation? Do you shut down or lash out? Take to unhealthy habits to deal with the pressure building up inside of you?

How you handle life challenges can have a major impact on factors that have been proven to negatively impact your heart health.

Stress may affect behaviors and factors that increase heart disease risk, including high blood pressure, cholesterol levels, smoking, physical inactivity and overeating. So step back and take a deep breath — for your heart's sake.

OVERALL BODY IMPACT

Bodies react to stress in different ways. You may experience a headache, back strain or even stomach pains if you're stressed out. Your energy level can be greatly reduced and your sleeping patterns disturbed.

All of these factors can set off a chain of events that leads to a potentially compromised cardiovascular system.

When you're stressed, your body releases adrenaline, a hormone that temporarily causes your breathing and heart rate to speed up and your blood pressure to rise. Depending upon how long you're stressed, your body may experience this set of circumstances off and on for days at a time.

And although the link between stress and heart dis-



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ease isn't clearly defined by organizations like the American Heart Association, chronic stress may cause some people to depend on unhealthy lifestyle habits, like drinking too much alcohol, which can increase your blood pressure

and may damage artery walls.

DEALING WITH STRESS

Managing stress is a challenge, but a necessity if you hope to be a picture of good

health. A few studies cited by the American Heart Association have examined how well treatment or therapies work in reducing the effects of stress on cardiovascular disease, and the results have shown positive links.

The best place to start when dealing with your stress is a qualified professional. Speak to your physician about how you're feeling. They will be able to refer you to a specialist who can offer effective treatment or preventive strategies.

Understanding Blood Pressure

You may know your blood pressure numbers, but do you truly understand them?

Typically recorded as two numbers written in a ratio, such as 117/76 mm Hg, your blood pressure measurement is a vital one that can alert physicians of an issue going on with your body, specifically your heart.

The American Heart Association recommends a blood pressure screening at your regular healthcare visit or once every two years if your blood pressure is less than 120/80.

THE NUMBERS

Systolic: The top number of your blood pressure reading represents the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats, or when the heart muscle contracts. This is the higher of the two numbers.

Diastolic: The lower of the two numbers, this bottom measurement records the pressure in the arteries between heartbeats, which is when the heart muscle relaxes and refills with blood.

Typically more attention is given to the top number as the major risk factor for heart disease, especially for people over 50 years old.

This systolic figure generally rises steadily with age because of many factors, including plaque buildup and increasing stiffness of larger arteries.



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HEALTHY MEASUREMENTS

A normal blood pressure reading, defined by the American Heart Association, is less than 120/80. Numbers that may signal a warning sign for a heart issue are measured and

defined as the following:

Prehypertension: 120-139/80-89

Hypertension Stage 1: 140-159/90-99

Hypertension Stage 2: 160 or higher/100 or higher

Hypertensive Crisis (Emergency Care Needed): Higher than 180/Higher than 110

HIGH READINGS

A single high reading does not necessarily mean that you have high blood pressure. However, if readings stay at 140/90 or above over time, your doctor will likely recommend a treatment program that may include lifestyle changes and prescription medication.

Diet Spotlight: The Nut

Almost everyone has a favorite nut. Almonds, cashews, peanuts and every nut in between each has its own distinct flavor.

While enjoyed by many people, new research shows that nut consumption is not nearly high enough when considering the positive impact nuts can have on the heart.

Nutrition experts recommend the inclusion of nuts in a heart-healthy diet, but a new study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that about 60 percent of Americans don't consume these foods on a daily basis.

The study, released in December 2014 and conducted in 2009 through 2010, highlights a major gap in the American diet that could be doing more harm than we realize.

The ideal level of consumption is about an ounce-and-a-half of nuts – equal to about 240 calories – according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration guidelines on reducing heart disease.

The CDC study reveals that only about 14 percent of men and 12 percent of women reached that level of consumption.

THE POWER OF NUTS

Because nuts are high in protein, small portions can be eaten as a replacement



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for other protein foods. Adequate consumption of nuts has been linked, the CDC reports, to decreased obesity, cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome and diabetes.

For the purpose of the study, the CDC definition of nuts included everything from peanuts, peanut butter and cashews to pumpkin seeds and sesame paste, among many others.

VERSATILITY

Adding nuts to your regular diet is easy and convenient. From cashews to almonds, nuts are easy to pack and require no cooking. Throw some nuts into smoothies or

salads, and watch the flavors come alive.

Nuts also are great for on-the-go snacking. Fill up a sandwich bag with your favorite nuts and dried fruit for a nutritious, heart-healthy boost.

About Arrhythmia

The term arrhythmia refers to any change from the normal heartbeat and can be a confusing condition. Some arrhythmias may be completely harmless while others can be life-threatening.

Before delving deeper into the different types of arrhythmia, it's important to understand the heart.

- The normal heart is a strong, muscular organ that pumps blood continuously through the circulatory system.

- Each day the average heart beats (expands and contracts) 100,000 times and pumps about 2,000 gallons of blood.

- In a 70-year lifetime, an average human heart beats more than 2.5 billion times.

TYPES OF ARRHYTHMIA

Some arrhythmias are so brief that the overall heart rate is only slightly altered. When arrhythmias last longer, they may cause the heart rate to be too slow or too fast or the heart rhythm to be erratic. These factors are dangerous because they cause the heart to pump blood less effectively.

These are the most common types of rhythm disorders, as defined by the American Heart Association:

- Atrial fibrillation: Upper heart chambers contract irregularly

- Bradycardia: Slow heart rate

- Conduction disorders:

Heart does not beat normally

- Premature contraction:



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Early heart beat

- Tachycardia: Very fast heart rate

- Ventricular fibrillation: Disorganized contraction of lower chambers of the heart

CAUSES OF ARRHYTHMIA

A variety of factors can

cause an arrhythmia to take place, according to the American Heart Association, including:

- The heart's natural pacemaker develops an abnormal rate or rhythm;

- The normal conduction pathway is interrupted; and

- Another part of the heart takes over as pacemaker

PREVENTION & TREATMENT

Once your doctor has documented that you have an arrhythmia, he or she will determine if it requires treatment. He or she will also decide whether your arrhythmia causes symptoms or puts you at risk for more serious

arrhythmias or complications of arrhythmias in the future.

After a treatment program is built by your doctor, it is important that you stick to the plan and take things one day at a time. Help others to understand by educating them about your condition and by asking for support with your treatment plan.

Signs of Heart Failure

While you're not afforded the convenience of crystal clear warning signs for heart failure, there are many symptoms that may appear.

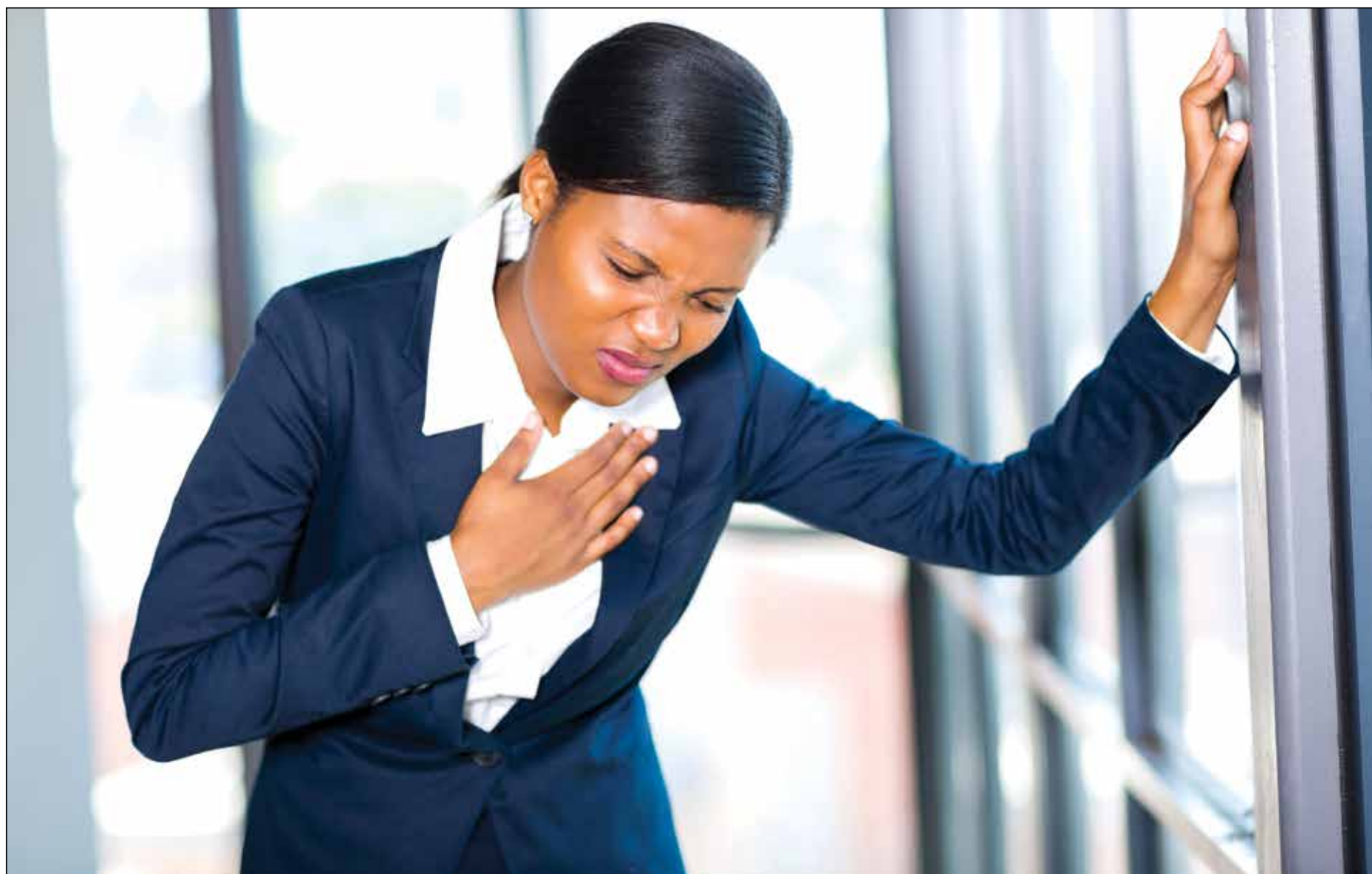
From shortness of breath to fluid buildup, it is important to educate yourself on the most common indications. Any one sign of heart failure may not be cause for alarm, but according to the American Heart Association, if you have more than one of the symptoms outlined below, you should report them to a healthcare professional and ask for an evaluation of your heart.

If you have been diagnosed with heart failure, it's even more important for you to keep track of symptoms and report any sudden changes to your healthcare team.

SHORTNESS OF BREATH

Are you running out of breath performing activities that you used to consider routine? Maybe you're waking up suddenly, struggling to breathe? These factors can be caused blood backing up in the pulmonary veins because the heart can't keep up with the supply.

Other related warning signs include waking up feeling tired, anxious or restless, or having to prop up your body while resting because of difficulty breathing. Take these signs seriously and consult your physician for their expert medical opinion.



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FATIGUE

Often related to breathlessness, a perpetual tired feeling and difficulty with everyday activities, such as shopping, climbing stairs, carrying groceries or walking may be a warning sign.

These instances can occur when the heart can't pump

enough blood to meet the needs of body tissues. The body diverts blood away from less vital organs, particularly muscles in the limbs, and sends it to the heart and brain. This makes it harder to exert physical energy to perform daily tasks.

FLUID BUILDUP

Symptoms of fluid buildup include swelling in the feet, ankles, legs or abdomen or weight gain. One telltale sign may be an inability to fit on your shoe because of significant swelling.

As blood flow out of the heart slows, blood returning to

the heart through the veins backs up, causing fluid to build up in the tissues. Additionally, the kidneys are less able to dispose of sodium and water, also causing fluid retention in the tissues. These factors show up as swelling in your body and should be checked by a medical professional.



Bad vs. Good Cholesterol

In the fight between LDL and HDL cholesterol, which type is winning within your body?

Cholesterol is transported through your bloodstream by carriers called lipoproteins, which are characterized in two ways: low-density lipoprotein (LDL) and high-density lipoprotein (HDL).

These are what make up the total cholesterol count you receive from your doctor, as well as one-fifth of your triglyceride level.

LDL (BAD CHOLESTEROL)

Considered bad cholesterol because it contributes to plaque, LDL cholesterol can clog arteries and make them less flexible. This condition is known as atherosclerosis.

A heart attack or stroke can occur if a clot forms and blocks a narrowed artery. Another condition, peripheral artery disease, can develop when

plaque buildup narrows an artery supplying blood to the legs.

HDL (GOOD CHOLESTEROL)

HDL cholesterol helps remove LDL cholesterol from the arteries, carrying it back to the liver, where it is broken down and passed from the body.

The American Heart Association states that one-fourth to one-third of blood cholesterol is carried by HDL. A healthy level of HDL cholesterol may protect against heart attack and stroke, while low levels have been shown to increase the risk of heart disease.

TRIGLYCERIDES

Another type of fat, triglycerides work to store excess energy from your diet. High levels of triglycerides in the blood are associated with atherosclerosis, and many people with heart disease or diabetes also have high triglyceride levels.

High triglycerides can be caused by obesity, physical inactivity, cigarette smoking, excess alcohol consumption and a diet high in carbohydrates.

Underlying diseases or genetic disorders are sometimes the cause of high triglycerides. People with high triglycerides often have a high total cholesterol level, including a high LDL cholesterol level and low HDL cholesterol.

Mental Health & Heart Health

The connection between mental and physical well-being is being researched at great lengths by the medical community.

Researchers are busy trying to find tangible connections between mental health and heart health.

Research shows there could be physiological links, the American Heart Association reports, between a person feeling down and their efforts in seeking relief from smoking, drinking or eating fatty foods.

The same biological and chemical factors that trigger mental health issues and could also influence heart disease.

DEPRESSION

While the American Heart Association states that there is no firm research linking stress to heart disease, there are signs pointing to it as an additional risk factor. Being stressed or unhappy can increase hormones like adrenaline and cortisol, which can both impact your blood pressure and heart rate.

You should monitor yourself and your loved ones closely, especially those dealing with rehabilitation and recovery from heart disease or stroke. The American Heart Association reports that having heart disease or a stroke can cause anxiety or depression, which can get in the way of rehab or other



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aspects needed to regain physical health.

An estimated 1 in 10 of Americans ages 18 and older report depression. The American Heart Association cites studies that show that up to 33 percent of heart

attack patients end up developing some degree of depression.

WHAT TO DO

Start by discussing how you are feeling, both physi-

cally and mentally, with your healthcare provider. He or she will be able to help, or refer you to the most appropriate care or provide the best place to start.

It may take a combination of counseling and medica-

tion to help deal with depression. Patients may be taught methods of dealing with relaxing and relieving stress, including breathing exercises, meditation or a focus on healthier lifestyle changes.