

Stress and anxiety play major role in heart health

Written by

Dr. David Vickery
GUEST COLUMNIST

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There are many factors that affect the health of your heart and cardiovascular system. One of the largest is stress.

We all have stress in our lives and really cannot control what stress enters our lives. We have some control over some stressors, but many just happen to us. But not all stress is negative. There can be positive stressors that initiate productive responses in our lives.

We tend to respond to the stress present in our lives, especially the negative stressors that produce anxiety, worry, fearfulness and uncertainty. Negative stress that produces anxiety affects many body functions. It may elevate blood pressure, elevate heart rate and affect the regulation of your blood sugar.

Anxiety affects overall energy levels, your sleep and sense of emotional well-being. Anxiety affects the choices you make every day — what you eat, habits you engage in, whether or not you exercise.

Many people cope well with anxiety and

make good choices, but many do not. Increased use of tobacco, alcohol and consuming fatty or sugary foods are symptomatic.

Other indications are feeling too tired to exercise or perceived lack of time due to the stressors. Physical symptoms associated with stress due to anxiety include racing heart, sweating, shaking, chest tightness, shortness of breath and physical exhaustion, among others. These symptoms provoke further worries about what physical problems may be causing them. It is important to note that there are many potential causes of these symptoms but anxiety is one main cause.

How is this related to the health of your heart? If struggle with anxiety and stress, then this may influence many of your choices as well as your sense of physical wellness. Poor food choices can lead to obesity, elevated cholesterol or diabetes. Dependencies such as tobacco and alcohol lead to disease. Tobacco use is a direct risk factor for heart disease. Elevated

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blood pressure, sleep deprivation and ongoing fatigue all contribute to the health of your heart.

What can you do? Everyone experiences stress. You need to learn how to manage stress and promote the right responses. It may be time for counseling if this is a chronic struggle. Reduce dependency on caffeine, alcohol, tobacco or sugar.

Focus on eating foods that provide you with the right kind of energy. Get into a healthy sleep routine that provides you energy to face your day. A regular exercise regimen is proven to help with anxiety, sleep and overall energy. Take up a form of exercise that focuses on deep breathing,

Make a decision today to no longer let stress have a controlling influence on you. This will certainly help promote a healthier heart for you.

This is the opinion of Dr. David Vickery, a family medicine doctor in Asheville. His proactive focus on primary care for adults and children with additional interest in dermatology and sports medicine. He is a member of the WNC/BCMS.

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The advertisement features the USA TODAY logo at the top left, followed by the word "AutoPilot" in a large, bold, black font with a blue airplane icon to its right. Below the title is a smartphone displaying the app's interface, which includes a "USA TODAY Meeting" section for Sep 21, 2009, and a flight schedule for BNA to IAD. To the right of the phone, the text reads "The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®". Below this, it says "Presented by: Hampton" with the Hampton logo. At the bottom right, a blue button with white text says "SEE HOW IT WORKS »".

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