

SCHOOL NURSE DAILY NEWSLETTER

Scripture of the Month


Daniel 12:3 (NIV)

"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."

Topic of the Month **THE STRESSED HEART**

By: Tamra Douglas-Atkinson, BSN, RN

Reviewed by: Hopiann Coombs BSN, RN, Reneta Mitchell, AsCJ, Shanique Haughton-Blake, BSN, RN



It's Heart Month, and that means we are putting a little more emphasis on taking care of our heart's health. But what does it truly mean to take care of your heart? For some, it means eating more greens, exercising more, drinking adequate water throughout the day, or maybe even laying off the alcohol a bit. Today I want us to give it another meaning. Let's talk about how stress affects the heart.

The truth is, stress does not directly cause heart problems, but the side effects of being severely stressed can affect how our body reacts, which can put a strain on the heart.

Just for context, we become stressed when our mixture of feelings become too overwhelming to manage. It can be triggered by many things: school work, exams, conflicts, relationship problems, or even bullying – and it is nothing to be ashamed of, it is a natural response to life's troubles.

However, though it is a natural response, not many of us can identify when we are actually stressed, and that is mainly because my stress response may be different than yours. Stress affects us mentally and physically, and it is important that we know how to identify stress within our body.

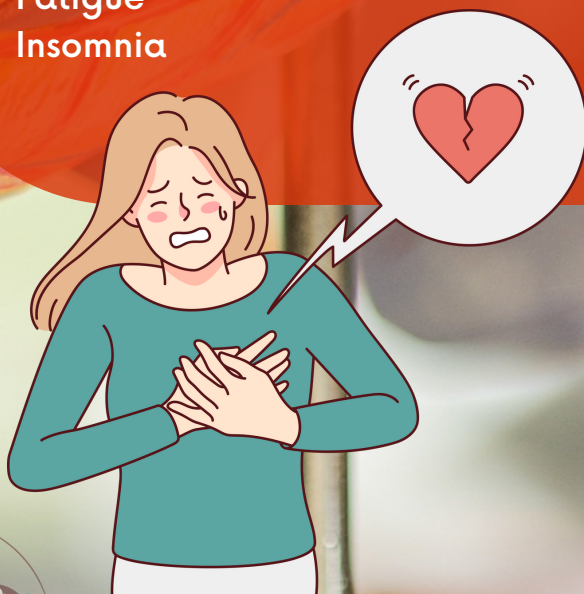


(TIP: if you know how your body's normal response to everyday life, you will know how to pinpoint the abnormalities within your body. So, if you haven't already, pay attention to your body and your bodily cues.)



WHAT ARE SOME SIGNS OF BEING STRESSED?

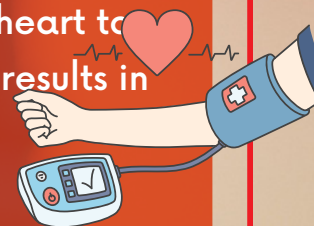
- Headaches
- Aches and pains
- Chest pain
- Exhaustion or trouble sleeping
- Dizziness
- Increased blood pressure
- Difficulty concentrating
- Overeating or not eating enough
- Fatigue
- Insomnia



HOW DOES STRESS AFFECT MY HEART?

As mentioned before, stress does not directly cause heart disease, however, there is a strong relationship between chronic/long-term stress and the heart's health.

Increases our blood pressure – Our body goes into a state of 'fight or flight' mode when we are stressed. During this state, our body releases the hormones adrenaline (fight or flight hormone) and cortisol (stress hormone). When chronically stressed, the stress response is prolonged and these hormones are released over a long period of time. This signals the heart to beat faster, narrows the blood vessels for a long duration, and this results in the blood pressure increasing.



This overexertion of the heart muscles leads to cardiovascular events such as heart attack, stroke, heart failure, and abnormal heart rhythms.

Atherosclerosis – Research tells us that, when we are stressed, the part of our brain that deals with emotions (amygdala), signals the bone marrow to produce extra white blood cells. Overtime, these cells contribute to a buildup of fatty deposits in our arteries (plaque). Because of this, our arteries become narrowed and results in inflammation of our arteries.

If this happens, it can induce the creation of blood clots, that can block the flow of blood and oxygen to the heart – and in severe cases, cause the cells in the heart to die. This also contributes to heart attacks.





Unhealthy habits – The way that we respond to stress also plays a huge part in this. A sedentary lifestyle, unhealthy diets, increased alcohol intake and smoking habits also contribute to decreasing your heart's health. These all increase the risk factors of cardiovascular disease including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, and obesity.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE STRESSED



1. It is first important to understand why you are stressed. Locating your triggers will be of utmost importance. After you have identified why you are stressed then everything else will fall into place.
2. Talk to someone that you trust. Opening up can do a world of good through helping you feel less alone in a situation. You may also consider seeing a counsellor or therapist.
3. Exercising has proven to help improve our moods and regulate stress levels well.
4. Don't be afraid to cry, that is your body regulating stress by getting rid of cortisol – the hormone released when stressed.
5. Do something that helps you relax and take your mind off things that overwhelms you (for a while). Find a new hobby, play a sport, go for a walk, watch a movie, or even play some games. Sometimes it helps to disconnect and refocus on something else.




HELPFUL
TIPS

Nurse D's Tip & Dear Parents

With the regional exams coming up, it is important for our children/students to learn how to cope with stress. It is not uncommon for students to have a high stress levels in this time period – SBAs and IAs are due, past papers are being passed around, that group work is not finished because of that one group member, practicals are around the corner and you have yet to master 'that one skill'. It is difficult to manage all of that PLUS interpersonal issues with friends and family.

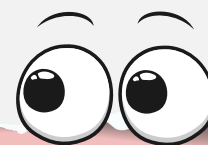
It's also important for us as parents and guardians to be able to pinpoint when our children need a break and need some help. We should be in their corner reminding them to eat, ensuring they don't pull all-nighters, helping them complete their assignments, and so much more.

With that said, research a few coping skills and pick the best ones that work for you. And don't forget to talk to someone about what's going on.





Den Cu Yah!



Your heart health is your responsibility, take care of it.

thank you



Disclaimer: The content on this newsletter should not be used in place of medical/professional consultation or advice, but to be used for educational purposes only.

REFERENCES

British Heart Foundation (n.d.). Stress and anxiety in young people.
<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/support/children-and-young-people/managing-your-lifestyle/stress-and-anxiety-in-young-people>

Cleveland Clinic (2021). Stress. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/11874-stress>

Health Partners (n.d.). The effects of stress on the heart: Here's what you should know.
<https://www.healthpartners.com/blog/effects-of-stress-on-the-heart/#:~:text=Acute%20stress,-if%20you%27re&text=But%20if%20you%20have%20risk,is%20serious%2C%20it%27s%20usually%20temporary.>

"Stress can damage your heart! How Chronic Stress affects Cardiovascular Health". Youtube.
<https://youtu.be/MHKuEXGCUuM>