

# STRESS & ANXIETY

## STRESS AND ANXIETY:

It is quite common to feel down after you have had a heart event or finding out you have a heart condition. Some common feelings that you may experience after a heart event or diagnosis of a heart condition:

- Sadness
- Anxiety/ worry
- Feeling tired all the time
- Lack of energy
- Frustration
- Isolation
- Shock/denial
- Tearfulness
- Poor appetite or overeating
- Difficulty falling asleep
- Anger

When you have a stressful situation, your body reacts by releasing a hormone called adrenaline which makes your breathing more rapid, speeds up your heart rate and causes your blood pressure to rise. These physical reactions prepare you to deal with the stressful situation by confronting it or by running away from it — also known as the "fight or flight" response.

Research shows that emotional wellness is strongly linked to cardiac health. People who experience high stress levels, anxiety or depression may also make lifestyle choices that increase their risk of high blood cholesterol and increased blood pressure – such as avoiding exercise, overeating, eating unhealthy foods or smoking.

Feeling down every once in a while is a normal part of life, but sometimes stress/anxiety levels become excessive or occur over a period of weeks or even months and can interfere with daily life. Learning to reduce the negative effects of stress in healthy positive ways is an important part of heart health.

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO MANAGE STRESS/ANXIETY

### ***Practice short bouts of relaxed breathing, from 30 seconds to 3 minutes, at least twice a day.***

Taking the time to relax is an important way to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. Relaxation also helps to lower adrenaline levels.

#### *Tips for Relaxed Breathing:*

- Tune into your breathing
- Count the number of 'beats' of your inhale and the number of 'beats' of your exhale
- Slow down either your inhale or your exhale so they are equal in length
- Continue at this pace for 3 breaths
- Slowly lengthen your inhale and exhale, which slows down your breathing. Continue at this pace for a few more breaths
- This exercise should not feel forced or uncomfortable – go at your own pace

Think about some places in your day-to-day life you could begin to use as an opportunity to practice, such as:

- Waiting in line at lunch or the checkout
- Every time at the bus or C-train stop
- When waiting for the microwave or toaster

### **Get moving**

Regular physical activity helps to relieve mental and physical tension. It also helps your body use adrenaline which can help deal with stress. Walking is a great way to incorporate physical activity into your day. Thirty minutes of physical activity is ideal – remember this can be accumulated throughout the day (i.e. three separate 10 minute walking sessions). Start out with a minimum of 4,000 steps daily and try to increase the steps by at least 200 steps per day each week. A pedometer is a great tool to help you along the way.

### **Embrace laughter**

Laughter makes you feel good and is your body's built-in method for stress release. The next time you hear a funny joke or read something funny, laugh out loud – even when you are alone.

### **Get enough sleep**

Try to get six to eight hours of sleep each night. If you have difficulty falling asleep, try to relax or practice breathing. Often worrying about not being able to fall asleep is a main reason for poor sleep.

### **Do something that makes you feel good**

Go for a walk, meet a friend for lunch, read a book or listen to music. Taking the time to enjoy things that make you happy is a great way to let your worries go.



## **EMOTIONAL WELLNESS RESOURCES**

### **Access Mental Health: 403-943-1500**

This services connects you to a broad range of community-based services and resources. It operates Monday to Friday from 7:30 am to 7:00 pm.

### **Distress Centre or Alberta Mental Help Line**

If you are feeling distressed at any time, you can also call the Distress Centre 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 403-266-1605 or the Alberta Mental Health Help Line at 1-877-303-2642.

## **SUPPORT GROUPS**

### **Heart to Heart Support Society of Calgary:**

Heart to Heart Support Society of Calgary is a non-profit organization that offers support and encouragement to individuals with heart disease, their family and friends. Heart to Heart group meetings are held the third Wednesday of each month. For more information, visit [www.hearttoheartsupportsociety.ca](http://www.hearttoheartsupportsociety.ca).

### **Women to Women:**

This group focuses on the unique issues women with heart disease are faced with. They meet on the first Tuesday of the month and their meetings and topic presentations are planned a year in advance. For more information, visit [www.womenscardiacsupport.org](http://www.womenscardiacsupport.org).