

MANAGE STRESS & SLEEP WELL

Being diagnosed with a heart condition can be a major source of stress. Many people wonder if what they are feeling is normal.

This chapter will help you understand the role of stress in heart health, while introducing various strategies to help make the recovery process a little less stressful.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

This chapter will provide tools to help you successfully cope with stress. You will learn how:

- Persistent problems with stress can affect your heart through the “fight-or-flight” response
- To monitor whether stress is a problem for you, and track your stress response
- To cope with stress using strategies such as relaxation, challenging unhelpful thoughts, and keeping a journal
- Emotional reactions are significant part of stress and heart health
- Heart conditions can affect sleep, and tips to help you sleep better



MANAGING STRESS

Living with a heart condition is an emotional experience, not just a physical one. In the first few months after the diagnosis or treatment of a heart problem, you might experience a mix of feelings including shock, fear, worry, guilt, gratitude, anger, relief, numbness, or sadness. You might also notice symptoms like sleep problems, tearfulness, inability to concentrate, or distressing thoughts about future health issues. These experiences might surprise you, especially if you are “not usually an emotional person”. It is important to know these are perfectly normal responses to a life-changing situation. Usually emotional changes and accompanying symptoms resolve over time.

The way you’re feeling right now will depend on a lot of things including your personality, past experiences, physical abilities, and life goals. Sometimes, unpleasant emotions can also come from physical effects of your illness or medications. Another thing that impacts how you feel is your perception about your heart condition and its consequences. The table below shows how certain types of perceptions lead to certain types of emotions:

PERCEPTION	EMOTIONAL REACTION	EXAMPLE
Uncertainty	Anxiety	You may feel anxious because you are uncertain about whether your heart disease treatments are working.
Loss	Sadness	You may feel sad because you have lost your ability to do some of the activities you used to enjoy.
Injustice	Anger	You may feel angry because you believe it is not fair that you had a heart attack.

Regardless of what you are feeling, it is important to have strategies to handle the stress of your recovery and to know when to seek help.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is one reason people experience emotional changes after a heart event. Stress is the experience of tension you experience when faced with a challenging situation. When you perceive a situation as stressful, your body experiences the

“fight-or-flight” response. This response involves a complex set of changes to your hormones, nervous system, and immune system. It is meant to give you a surge of energy so you can “fight” off danger or “flight” for safety. Blood moves to your large muscle groups, your muscles tense, your digestion slows, you breathe more rapidly, your veins constrict (causing an increase in blood pressure), your heart rate speeds up, and you may have sharpened mental focus. The fight-or-flight response is designed to help people overcome short-term, physical challenges. For example, it is beneficial to have energy to escape or fight a grizzly bear while on a hike in the mountains. Once the threatening situation has resolved—for example, you run away from the bear and are now safe—your body begins to relax and return to a normal state.

IS IT STRESS?

Some of the symptoms of stress are the same as symptoms that are caused by your heart condition or certain medications. Talk to your doctor about what is causing your symptoms.

In modern life, few stressors are short-term physical stressors (like coming across a grizzly bear). You might be faced with chronic (long-term) job pressure, financial constraints, relationship conflicts, or long commutes. With managing a heart condition, you might be dealing with stressors related to adopting lifestyle changes, taking medications, and having fears about recurrent health issues. Even though the stressors of today tend to be chronic, our body responds with the same fight-or-flight reaction. As a result, stress can “pile up” while our body tries to remain in high alert over long periods of time.

Many people who come through cardiac rehabilitation have been told that stress may increase their risk of having another heart event, or that stress should be avoided during their recovery. On the one hand, stress is a normal part of life and usually does not cause a problem. On the other hand, intense or persistent stress can contribute to psychological and physical problems including heart disease.

PAYING ATTENTION TO YOUR STRESS RESPONSE

Most people don’t pay attention to their stress levels until they already feel overwhelmed. To prevent stress from becoming a problem, it can be valuable to know your personal pattern of stress symptoms. Catching stress early can help you deal with stressful emotions and situations more effectively.

In the table below, there are four categories of stress symptoms. If you notice some of these changes in your emotions, physical sensations, thoughts, or behaviours (or

if someone else notices these changes in you), it may be a sign that you need to take action to cope with stress.

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS	
EMOTIONAL CHANGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - anger, irritability, or feeling “ready to explode” - worrying and feeling anxious - boredom or reduced enjoyment in activities - feeling overwhelmed or pressured - feeling guilty or ashamed - loneliness - feeling helpless to change things
PHYSICAL CHANGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - exhaustion - headaches - increased susceptibility to illnesses - development of skin rashes - elevated heartbeat - rapid breathing - stiff muscles (e.g., neck, back) - excessive sweating - chest pain or tightness - digestion problems
BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased use of alcohol or other substances - eating more or less than usual - changes in sleep habits - nail biting - teeth grinding - inability to get things done - crying more often - withdrawing from friends and loved ones - lashing out

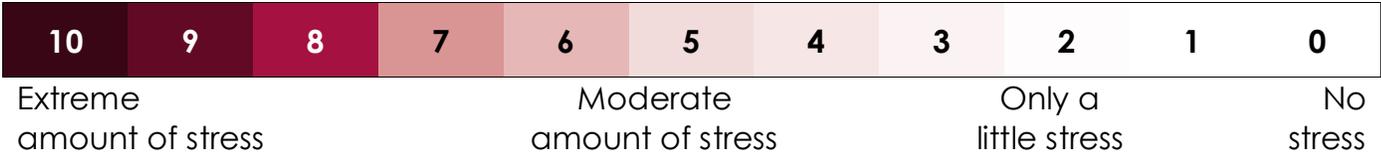
THINKING (COGNITIVE) CHANGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - trouble concentrating - indecisiveness - thoughts of running away - memory loss and forgetfulness - worry about the future - replaying negative memories from the past - frequent critical thoughts about yourself or others - jumping to the worst-case scenario
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MANAGING YOUR STRESS

There are many ways to cope with stress. You will likely find that some strategies for coping with stress work better for you than others. In addition, you may already have a list of things you do that are helpful in reducing your stress (e.g., spending time with family, taking a bath, going to religious services, reading your favourite book). Below are a few strategies for coping with stress that can help you start to get back on track emotionally as well as physically.

1 TRACK YOUR STRESS RESPONSE

To prevent stress from becoming too intense or chronic, monitor your stress levels on a regular basis. One method of tracking stress is to schedule 1-2 times a day to ask yourself, "how much stress am I currently feeling?". You can answer this question using the stress scale below. To know where you are on the stress scale, reflect on your symptoms of stress outlined in the table above. As a rule of thumb, if your answer is 5 or above, it might be worthwhile to consider some stress management strategies.



2 IDENTIFY AND ELIMINATE YOUR STRESSORS

It is important to distinguish between situations that trigger stress and your response to them. Situations that trigger stress are called "stressors." Whether a situation serves as a stressor depends on your interpretation. If you interpret a situation as a mild hassle you will experience only little stress, whereas if you interpret a situation as a major problem you will experience extreme stress.

Think about your top 10 stressors right now. They might include major events like illness in yourself or in a family member, financial problems, having a demanding job, a recent divorce, a career change, or the death of a loved one. Stressors can also include minor hassles like dealing with traffic jams, waiting in lines, being put on hold on the phone, or a disagreement with your neighbour. Take time to write down your stressors so you can evaluate whether you can change the situation. For example, can you eliminate some of your responsibility at work, or ask for help? Also, you might notice that your stress response involves overreacting to minor hassles; in these cases, can you work to change your reaction? Dealing with controllable problems in practical ways can help reduce the sources of stress in our lives.

3 ENGAGE IN REGULAR EXERCISE

Regular exercise is a very helpful way to cope with stress. You are already a step in the right direction by taking part in the exercise program at cardiac rehabilitation!

Research shows that exercise-based cardiac rehabilitation programs reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression among people with heart disease. Exercise helps your stress levels in a few ways. Exercise helps reduce the physical fight-or-flight response you experience when you are stressed, limiting the wear-and-tear on your heart. In fact, people who are physically fit show less intense physical responses to stress—that is, smaller increases in blood pressure and heart rate—compared to people who are not physically fit. Exercise can also help with stress by improving your self-esteem and by distracting you from daily worries and hassles.

4 USE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

People who successfully manage their stress often say they set aside a time each day to relax. Relaxation involves specific skills you can learn to reduce the fight-or-flight response in the body such as breathing exercises and muscle relaxation techniques. There are dozens of techniques available, and the trick is to find what works for you. Some effective techniques include diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, tai chi, yoga, and mindfulness meditation.

Relaxation has been shown to help reduce stress, and the physical response and negative feelings that come along with it. Relaxation helps to:

- Lower adrenaline and blood pressure
- Increase feelings of being in control
- Reduce feelings of depression and anxiety
- Improve sleep
- Reduce heart symptoms, including angina
- Improve the health of the body's immune system

Relaxation can be especially helpful after a heart event. There are several self-learning materials and in-person programs available to help you learn basic relaxation techniques. These resources are listed at the end of the manual.

5 CHALLENGE UNHELPFUL THINKING

Your thoughts about a situation play a large role in how much stress you experience. Stress can make a person's thoughts race. When you're sad, anxious, or angry, you might find yourself thinking things like "my life is completely over now" or "I will never be able to make all of these changes to my life." These unhelpful thoughts can further increase worry and stress, causing a vicious cycle of negative thoughts. Research shows that we can *change our feelings by changing our thoughts*.

It may seem odd to try to change your thoughts. With practice you will be able to identify when your thoughts are negative or exaggerated, and how your thoughts are impacting your emotions. Challenging unhelpful thinking involves identifying your thoughts and evaluating whether they are realistic, healthy, or helpful. From there, you can choose which thoughts to act on, and which ones to ignore or change. It is important to remember that challenging unhelpful thoughts is *not* the same as being constantly positive or optimistic. Seeing through "rose-coloured glasses" can lead some people to

ADDRESSING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Ask yourself 10 questions:

1. Is this thought really true?
2. Am I over-emphasizing a negative aspect of this situation?
3. What is the worst thing that is likely to happen?
4. Is there anything positive about this situation?
5. Am I jumping to conclusions and assuming a negative outcome?
6. How do I know this situation will turn out this way?
7. Is there another way of looking at the situation?
8. What difference will this make next week, month, or year?
9. If I had just one month to live, how important would this be?
10. Am I using words such as never, always, worst, terrible for horrible to describe this situation?

be unrealistic about their circumstance, which can actually lead to more stress in the long-run. Here are 3 simple steps that can help you challenge unhelpful thoughts:

- 1. Identify the unhelpful thoughts.** Check your thoughts right when you start feeling sad, anxious, angry, overwhelmed, and frustrated. Ask yourself “What did I say to myself right before I started to feel this way?”
- 2. Evaluate whether the thought is realistic.** Ask yourself questions that test whether or not the thought is really true. Is it true all the time? Are you ignoring any strengths or positives? Are you using extreme words like “never” or “always”?
- 3. Identify a more realistic thought.** Based on the evidence for and against your thought, substitute the unhelpful thought with a thought that serves you better.

Below are some examples of how to turn unhelpful thoughts into alternative, more realistic thoughts:

“My life is over now.”

More realistic thought: A heart problem is *not* a death sentence. If it was, cardiac rehabilitation programs would not exist. Many people with heart disease live long and healthy lives, and so can I.

“My heart is worn out.”

More realistic thought: I can strengthen my heart by attending cardiac rehabilitation and by making healthy changes in my life.

“I will never be able to follow through with my exercise plan; I’ve tried before and always failed.”

More realistic thought: Just because I gave up in the past doesn’t mean I will give up this time. I’ll do my best to work towards my exercise goals by taking things one step at a time.

Now, it's your turn to practice:

“Now that I’ve had a heart attack, I’m going to lose my job, so I won’t be able to pay rent and utilities.”

More realistic thought: _____

“My angina (chest pain) was really bad during exercise today. That must mean my condition is getting worse – I just know it.”

More realistic thought: _____



PARTICIPATE IN A STRESS MANAGEMENT CLASS

Stress management classes teach individuals about stress and effective strategies for coping with it. The classes are offered by hospitals, rehabilitation programs, and therapists in the community. You will find information on various stress management resources in Chapter 10 of this manual. People in cardiac rehabilitation who complete a stress management class tend to have reduced symptoms of heart disease (e.g., angina and arrhythmia), improved emotional well-being, and increased chances of returning to work after heart disease.

COPING WITH DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, AND ANGER

It is common to feel depressed, anxious, or angry after major life events such as the diagnosis and treatment of a heart condition. These emotions generally become less intense after a few months, as you start to feel like your usual self and return to a regular routine. It is important to manage these emotional changes early on to prevent more serious problems with your mood and health.

If you are having difficulty coping with the emotional aspects of your heart problem, refer to the *Resources* chapter at the end of the manual or contact your family doctor.

COPING WITH DEPRESSION

Depression (sometimes called major depressive disorder) is different from normal sadness.

Whereas a person might feel sad or down for a short period of time after a stressful situation, depression is a longer-term health condition that affects people's day-to-day functioning.

Depression can involve feelings of sadness, but it also involves other symptoms like irritability, withdrawal from social situations, feelings of guilt, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, sleep changes, thought of suicide, and/or loss of interest in activities a person usually enjoys. If you are feeling depressed most of the time and/or have lost a sense of pleasure in your life and these changes have lasted more than a few weeks, it is important to talk to your doctor about getting help.

Although the research statistics vary, depression occurs in about 1 in 5 cardiac patients. This is about 5 times higher than the general population. Depression also increases the chance of developing heart disease and the likelihood of poor recovery in people with heart disease. Depression may happen at any time during your recovery. The good news is that depression is treatable. Treatment of depression not only makes people feel better emotionally, it is also associated with better heart health including reduced chances of future heart problems.

SCREENING FOR DEPRESSION & ANXIETY

At the beginning of the cardiac rehab program, patients complete the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS). This screening tool aims to measure current symptoms of anxiety and depression.

If your depression and/or anxiety scores on this screening measure are elevated, our team will mail a letter to you outlining some resources that may be of help. Likewise, our team will notify your family doctor about elevations in your symptoms of anxiety and/or depression in order to ensure continuity of care.

If you have any questions or concerns about your score, please speak to our psychologist and your family doctor.

COPING WITH ANXIETY

Experiencing some anxiety is normal, and even beneficial, at times. Anxiety can help you take positive actions such as finishing a project, seeking medical help, or doing regular exercise. Anxiety symptoms can include emotional changes like feeling fearful, nervous, worried, or panicky. Anxiety symptoms can also include trouble sleeping, fidgeting, thinking about the worse-case scenario, and physical sensations (e.g., a pounding heart, sweating, or dizziness). After your heart event, you may feel anxious about new bodily symptoms, about the impact of your health on your job or relationships, about returning to your daily activities, or about what lies ahead in your recovery. It is important to talk to your family, friends, and healthcare team about your worries. If your symptoms of anxiety are overwhelming, do not hesitate to seek help.

You might benefit from further support if you experience any of the following:

- intense/ongoing anxiety
- frequent inability to stop or control worrying
- you are generally a nervous person

OVERCOMING ANGER

Anger is a typical reaction to situations that seem unjust. Being diagnosed with a heart problem and dealing with all the changes that follow are a big source of anger for many patients and their family members. In addition, some people who come through the cardiac rehab program say their anger was an issue long before their heart condition happened. The stress management strategies we've talked about so far are helpful for coping with anger. Because anger is so common at this phase of people's heart recovery, we have included additional information about anger that might be helpful to consider.

Anger isn't bad all the time. On the one hand, anger can make you feel energized to change a situation, can make you feel powerful, and can help you get what you want. On the other hand, anger can be a problem if it occurs all the time, causes ongoing conflict in important relationships, or if it occurs in situations where it may not be necessary. There is also evidence that excessive, frequent feelings of anger and hostility can increase the chances of heart disease. Anger can cause your blood vessels to narrow, reducing the amount of oxygen and blood that reaches your heart, which sometimes causes chest pain (angina).

Sometimes, people believe that if you "get the anger out," it will go away. Venting your anger through aggressive behaviour (e.g., yelling, punching) might feel good in the short-term, but frequent or extreme anger can have many negative effects

on your health and relationships. Anger can make your heart work harder by increasing blood pressure and heart rate. Research shows that, in the long-term, angry behaviour actually leads to *more* anger and aggression. Dealing with anger in productive ways can help you feel better and improve your relationships at work and home.

If you feel like you have problems coping with anger, here are some tips that might be useful:

- **Express your angry feelings in a journal.** Write down your personal thoughts about the anger you experience. What types of people or situations make you angry? How do you usually act when you are angry? What are the feelings that tend to accompany your anger (e.g., helpless, afraid, rejected)? Keeping a journal will help you better understand your anger, which will help you develop more effective ways to handle it.
- **Leave the situation.** When you notice yourself becoming angry, it can be helpful to give yourself a time-out. Leave the room, count to ten, or find other ways to calm your mind and body. It is much easier to think through a problem when you are not upset.
- **Think about others.** When interacting with others, put yourself in their shoes by trying to understand things from their perspective. Listen carefully to what others are saying and take time to think before responding. Consider how it might feel to be on the receiving end of your anger. This skill will help you communicate better with the people in your life and can prevent anger from building up.
- **Change your reaction to anger.** It can be hard to change the way you feel, but you can change the way you act. Practice more effective ways of reacting to anger, such as avoiding cursing or yelling. Instead, express your need while respecting others.
- **Think before you act.** When you feel angry, make a conscious effort to step away and ask yourself questions about the situation. You might ask yourself “is this issue important enough for me to get angry about,” “will getting angry make a difference,” or “would a jury of people agree that I should be angry about this?” If yes, “do I need to fix this situation, and can I fix it?” After answering these questions, if you decide that you should try to fix the situation at hand, take a time-out and calm down before acting.

SLEEPING WELL

Have you ever felt like you couldn't turn off your mind when you are trying to fall asleep? Have you awoken in the middle of the night and found it impossible to get back to sleep? It is not uncommon to experience a poor night's sleep, especially during times of worry or stress. However, poor sleep can take a toll on both physical and psychological well-being. Frequent episodes of poor sleep can lead to daytime problems with fatigue, mood, attention, and concentration. This can make even the simplest tasks difficult to accomplish and can impair your ability to effectively cope with stress. The following section will provide you with some tips on how you can improve your sleep, so that you have energy to take on the day.

SLEEP PROBLEMS

Some common sleep problems include trouble falling asleep, trouble staying asleep, and early morning awakenings. These problems can be caused by several things including life stress and worry, or external factors such as alcohol consumption and noise. Many heart medications can also impact the quality and quantity of your sleep.

Many people notice that their sleep improves in the weeks and months following their heart event. People tend to sleep better as their angina and other symptoms decrease, and as they get adjust to their new medications and lifestyle changes. For other people, though, this is not the case. If you notice your sleep problems persist over time, the cause of the sleep problem may relate to your daytime and/or bedtime habits. Fortunately, there are many things you can do to try and improve your sleep through good sleep hygiene.

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SLEEP

Sleep hygiene refers to the behaviours, conditions, and practices that surround sleep. Good sleep hygiene helps to promote continuous and restful sleep. The following tips may help you improve your sleep:

- **Go to bed only when sleepy.** There is no reason to go to bed if you are not sleepy enough to fall asleep. How sleepy is "sleepy enough"? Generally speaking, it is when you are fighting to remain awake. If you frequently spend time in bed when you are wide awake, it can actually teach your brain to link

SLEEP DISORDERS

There are more serious sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea – a disorder where a person has pauses in their breathing or shallow breaths while they sleep – that can affect your health. If you think you have a more serious sleep disorder, talk to your doctor.

your bed with the experience of feeling awake. In other words, it primes your body into feeling awake when you get into bed. Getting into bed too early also means more time to do things that are not relaxing, like compiling to-do lists in your mind, reviewing the events of the day, and worrying about sleep loss.

- **Get out of bed if you can't fall asleep.** If you can't fall asleep after getting into bed, or if you can't fall back asleep after awakening, get out of bed and do something relaxing or boring (in dim light) in another room until you feel sleepy again. This will prevent you from associating your bed with wakefulness instead of sleep.
- **Avoid reading or watching TV in bed.** If you are having trouble sleeping, the bed should be reserved for only sleep and sex. Avoid doing things in bed like eating, talking on the phone, or using the laptop. This helps train your brain to associate the bed with sleep, and to break the association between the bed and wakefulness. Exposure to bright light from cell phones, laptops, TVs, and lamps before bed can also affect your body's internal signals that promote sleep.
- **Establish a nightly routine.** Try to engage in relaxing/calming activities for at least an hour before bedtime. This helps your body separate day and night. Your nightly routine might include taking a warm bath, reading a book, doing some light yoga or stretching, having a conversation with a family member, listening to music, or practicing relaxation strategies. However, as described earlier, the pre-sleep routine should take place outside of the bedroom.
- **Set a regular sleep schedule.** Set a regular time to go to bed and to get up in the morning and stick to it. Although bedtimes may fluctuate on weekends, it is important to try to keep your schedule as regular as possible. If you do go to bed much later than usual one night, you should still try to wake up at your usual time the next morning.
- **Don't watch the clock.** Watching or checking the clock can remind you that you are still awake and have fewer hours available for sleep. This can increase anxiety and prevent sleep for even longer. Turn the clock around or cover it up so you can't see it!
- **Avoid stimulants and alcohol.** This includes coffee, tea, soft drinks, chocolate, and nicotine. Caffeine should be consumed in moderation and avoided after noon. Sleep is generally less restorative after consuming alcohol and can leave you more tired the next day, so avoiding alcohol may help improve your sleep.

- **Exercise regularly but complete your workout at least 3 hours before bedtime.** Exercise is known to improve sleep quality and quantity. However, exercising in the hours close to bedtime can prevent sleep through increased arousal. If you have trouble sleeping, it might be helpful to try completing your workouts in the morning or early afternoon.
- **Improve your sleep environment.** Make sure your bedroom is dark and quiet. Keep the room temperature comfortable, not too hot or too cold. If your partner snores or if there is a lot of environmental noise in your home, try wearing ear plugs or using a white noise machine.
- **Avoid daytime napping.** If you struggle with falling asleep, staying asleep, or early awakenings, it might be helpful to avoid sleeping during the day. The reasoning behind this is that the longer you stay awake during the day, the easier it is to fall asleep at night. That being said, it is fairly common when recovering from a heart procedure to feel exhausted during the day and you might find you're napping more than usual. If you must nap, consider doing so earlier in the day (e.g., before 3:00 p.m.) and keeping it less than 1 hour long.

OPTIMAL SLEEP

Most people believe they need a certain number of hours of sleep each night. However, sleep duration can vary from person to person. It is important that you discuss your sleep habits with your doctor or other sleep medicine practitioner to develop a detailed sleep plan that works best for you. Instead of focusing on the number of hours of sleep you get each night, try to focus on how you feel during the day after a good night's sleep versus a bad night's sleep. This will allow you to gauge your optimal wake and sleep times and the number of hours that may be best for you.

SLEEP MEDICATIONS & TREATMENTS

Under some circumstances, sleep medications may be useful in the *short-term* (i.e., a few times week, for a for weeks). However, there are serious risks with long-term use of sleep medications and some people require help from medical professionals to get off them. If you are on medications to help with your sleep, talk to your doctor about a plan to lower your dose and/or stop taking them completely.

There are several treatments for sleep problems that are much more effective and longer-lasting than medications, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I). If you are having problems with your sleep and the techniques listed above are not helping, please refer to the resources section of this manual for information on where to get help.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Did stress cause my heart condition?

Stress *contributes to* heart disease, but we can't say for sure whether stress directly caused your heart problem. Stress can affect the heart in two ways. First, it can make a person more likely to rely on short-term fixes, like smoking, drinking, not exercising regularly, and unhealthy eating – unhealthy behaviours *that are known to contribute to* heart disease. Second, stress releases certain hormones that increase blood pressure and encourage clotting of the arteries. As discussed earlier in this chapter, problems arise when stress is chronic (i.e., when it lasts a long time). When a person is under chronic stress, the body remains in “fight or flight” mode for days or weeks at a time. When the body is in high gear for so long, your artery walls become damaged by the increase in heart rate and blood pressure.

Are there any medications that can help me cope with my stress?

Medications alone are usually not the best way to cope with stress. Their effects are often short-lived, and they can prevent you from managing the causes of stress in your life. A much better approach is to manage your stress using the techniques outlined in this chapter – for example, by talking about your feelings, exercising, using relaxation techniques, and challenging unhelpful thoughts. If you need help learning these techniques, be sure to check out the resources section at the back of the manual. Stress is not the same as anxiety or depression. If you think you have severe anxiety or depression, talk to your doctor about whether you need to take medication.

Why would I want to join a stress management class?

Stress produces certain hormones, like cortisol and adrenaline, to pump through your body and increase your heart rate and blood pressure. Too much stress over a long period of time causes your body to remain in high gear and causes wear-and-tear on your body and heart. When people are stressed, they also tend to engage in behaviours that are bad for the heart, like drinking, smoking, overeating, and not exercising. Stress management classes teach strategies for managing stress, like relaxation breathing, and can help reduce symptoms of heart disease (e.g., angina and arrhythmia), improve emotional well-being, and increase the chances of returning to work after heart disease.

EDUCATION CLASSES

- **Alberta Health Services: Alberta Healthy Living Program**
A variety of classes and self-management workshops led by healthcare professionals or trained volunteers. Many classes also offered in Cantonese, Punjabi, Spanish and Tagalog. For more information or to register, visit www.ahs.ca/ahlp.

BOOKS

- Davis et al. (2008). The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook (6th Ed.)
- Greenberger et al (2015). Mood Over Mind: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think (2nd Ed.)
- Stahl et al. (2010). A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUPS

Support groups are a great way to meet other people who are living with a heart condition. They can help increase your social support network and are a great way to meet people who are also trying to make heart-healthy changes in their lives. Here are a few of the support groups for patients with heart problems in Calgary:

- **Heart to Heart Society:**
Provides support to people with heart disease, and visits patients in hospital and after discharge to help them and their families cope. Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month from September through May at the Horton Legion (9202 Horton Rd. SW) at 11:30 am.

For more information, visit their website: www.hearttoheartalberta.com
- **Woman to Woman Cardiac Support Group:**
A special interest group to address specific concerns of women with heart disease. Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. in the Learning Room at Repsol Sport Centre.

For more information, visit www.womenscardiacsupport.org or email info@womantowoman.com

STRESS, ANGER AND SLEEP RESOURCES

COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

There are a number of community-based resources in the Calgary if you are having a difficult time coping with depression, anxiety, anger, or other emotional aspects of life with heart disease.

- **Access Mental Health: 403-943-1500**
An organization that provides information on local addiction and mental health services. It operates Monday to Friday from 7:30 am to 7:00 pm.
- **Distress Centre: 403-266-4357 (HELP)**
A non-profit agency that delivers 24-hour support, counseling and resource referral services.
- **Health Link: 8-1-1**
Health advice and information provided by registered nurses and other healthcare professionals, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- **Emergency Department.** If you feel particularly distressed or suicidal, please go to the nearest hospital emergency department.

RESOURCES FOR SLEEP ISSUES

If you are looking for help to cope with sleeping difficulties, talk to your doctor. You can request that your family physician refer you to a specialized treatment program for sleep disorders, such as:

- Sleep Centre (Foothills Medical Centre): 403-944-2404
- Centre for Sleep and Human Performance: 403-254-6663 ext. 1

Self-help books are also available to help individuals with sleep difficulties:

- Silberman, S. A. (2009). *The insomnia workbook: A comprehensive guide to getting the sleep you need.* (1 ed.). Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Hauri, P., & Linde, S. (1996). *No more sleepless nights.* New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.