Stress and the Heart

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Everybody is affected by stress, but how a person manages their individual stress can have a significant effect on their health. It is known that stress causes the release of stress hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. While these hormones are critical to certain functions that protect us (think fight or flight), many are concerned that excessive production of these can potentially cause harm. Additionally, when under great stress, people are less likely to engage in stress relieving pleasurable activities and exercise, and are more likely to overeat, choose poor food options and smoke. These behaviors obviously increase a person’s risk for high cholesterol, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Stress can be caused by many things including life changes, illness, relationship issues, work overload, losing or starting a new job, unemployment or pregnancy. Sometimes stress can even occur from simple traffic irritations or the inconvenience of going to the DMV. Regardless of the cause, the body often sends signals that it is under pressure and needs a change of pace. Often people will ignore or miss those signs leading to more stress. Signs may include dizziness, grinding teeth, headaches, heartburn, muscle pain, inability to concentrate, irritability, anger, anxiety, compulsive eating, and increased use of drugs or alcohol.

Ideas for stress management include

- Eat healthy foods and avoid excessive alcohol consumption
- Quit using tobacco products
- Take time to relax daily
- Exercise regularly
- Sleep 7-8 hours per night
- Get help if feeling overwhelmed

For more detailed information about how stress affects your health or how to manage it more effectively, please visit the websites below or make an appointment with a physician at the LifeConnections Health Center.

http://www.cigna.com/healthinfo/rlxsk.html

http://www.cigna.com/healthinfo/ta5662spec.html