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How many times have you heard or even used common phrases containing the word “heart” that can mean so many different things? There are dozens; however, here are a few of the common ones you may be familiar with. Can you think of any more?

- **To wear your heart on your sleeve** (someone who does this is very open with their emotions and doesn't shy away from expressing them)
- **To have a change of heart** (deciding to do something completely different to what was originally planned)
- **To have a hearty breakfast** (probably means it wasn't so “heart-friendly” ☺)
- **To take heart** (to look at the bright side of things when faced with a bad situation and believe that all will turn out fine—this could actually protect your heart!)
- **To have a broken heart** (usually occurs when someone you love or are emotionally attached to ends a relationship.)
- **To have a heavy heart** (felt during times of sadness)
- **To be cold hearted or heartless** (showing no empathy or compassion towards others. Being cruel.)
- **To have a heart of gold or be big-hearted** (loving, caring, compassionate towards all creatures)

Your heart is truly an amazing organ! Without you even having to think about it, this powerhouse muscle, no bigger than your fist, will beat at least 100,000 times in a day and pump upwards of six quarts of blood each minute (or about 2,000 gallons per day) allowing you to function!



Please take a second now to place your hand on your heart and whisper “thank you” for all it has done to get you to this very moment. Please take another second to ask yourself “what am I doing to keep my heart as healthy as possible so it continues to provide me the opportunity to enjoy my life? Is there more I can do?” Acknowledgement is the first step!

**Every aspect of your life positively or negatively impacts your heart-health and your overall well-being.
 ...How you manage stress...What you eat...How much you exercise...How much sleep you get...
 Are you putting yourself at risk for heart disease?**

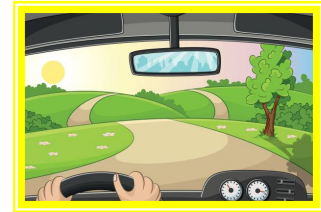


Know Your Risk for Heart Disease

Your age and family history can certainly increase your chances of developing heart disease. However, it's the day-to-day choices you make that will either prevent, reduce or accelerate your risk. Nearly 50% of all Americans have at least 1 of 3 key conditions that increases their risk for heart disease:

1. High Blood Pressure
2. High Cholesterol
3. And Smoking

You are in the drivers seat. Take the wheel and change directions by focusing on the factors you **can** control!



1.) Hypertension or High Blood Pressure

If your blood pressure is not controlled, it can not only affect your heart but other major organs as well, such as your kidneys and your brain.

Known as the "silent killer", high BP usually has no symptoms. The only way to know is to get it checked (by a healthcare professional, at your local pharmacy, or with a home BP monitor).

Go to: <https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/measure.htm> to learn more about measuring your BP at home, how often you should check it, and what to do if it's high. Plus there are handouts on ways to manage your blood pressure and forms for keeping track of your numbers.



Unhealthy Blood Cholesterol Levels

This waxy, fat-like substance is made by the liver and can also be found in certain foods. Your body makes enough of what it needs, yet on the Standard American Diet (**SAD**) people often get much more cholesterol from the foods they eat.



Blocked artery

Excess cholesterol (from consuming foods high in saturated fats) can build up in the walls of the arteries, including those of

the heart. This build-up causes a narrowing of the arteries which can lead to decreased blood flow.

LDL (low-density lipoprotein) also known as "bad" cholesterol—can cause the plaque build up in your arteries. LDL levels should be below 100.

HDL (high-density lipoprotein) also known as "good" cholesterol absorbs cholesterol and takes it back to the liver—the higher your HDL number the more protection it can provide against heart disease. Ideal level is 60 or higher. But 40 or higher for men and 50 or higher for women is acceptable.

Triglycerides are the chemical form in which most fats exist, in foods as well as in the body. Levels vary by age and gender. High levels, however, often co-exist with high total cholesterol levels, high LDL's and low HDL's.

Go to <https://www.cdc.gov/cholesterol/index.htm> to learn more.

Diabetes mellitus

Our body needs glucose (sugar) for energy. When we eat, glucose enters the blood stream, insulin is released from the pancreas which helps move the glucose into cells for energy. When you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make enough insulin, it can't use its own insulin as well as it should, or both.

This insufficient use (or availability of) insulin causes glucose to build up in the body. Diabetes is a very serious condition. 90% of those with diabetes have Type 2 which is preventable by making healthy lifestyle choices!

Normal fasting blood sugar should be 99 mg/dL or lower. 100 to 125 mg/dL indicates prediabetes.

The risk of death from heart disease for adults with diabetes is higher than for adults who do not have it.

Go to: <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/managing/index.html> for ways to prevent and/or manage diabetes.



Obesity

And finally obesity which can contribute to everything mentioned on this page! Having excess body fat is linked to higher "bad" cholesterol and triglyceride levels and to lower "good" cholesterol. It can lead to high blood pressure and diabetes as well as heart disease. Even reducing your weight by 5% can significantly reduce your risk for most chronic diseases!



Stress Can Increase Your Risk for Heart Disease

We all experience stress in our lives, that's normal and expected. However, stress can also come from physical causes such as not getting enough sleep or having an illness. Stress can also be emotional. Worrying, feeling overwhelmed, or anticipating the worse can trigger a fight or flight response in your body. All stress, even less dramatic causes like everyday obligations and pressures can make you feel you are not in control.

Your body's response to stress ("fight-or-flight") is automatic and meant to protect you from harm. The truth of the matter is that we now live in a time when this "urgency" is 24/7. We are constantly overwhelmed with information that often is laden with negative thoughts. The hormone cortisol is released every time you react to a stressful situation (whether real or perceived!) Studies have shown that consistently high levels of cortisol caused by chronic stress (long-term), can increase all the conditions I mentioned on the previous page such as increased blood cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure. (University of Rochester Medical Center)

70% of adults in the US say they feel stress or anxiety DAILY!

Ways to Help Reduce Stress Naturally

The suggestions for reducing stress are NOT new ideas. We all know that these things can help yet we don't do them or don't make them a consistent part of our lives. One common reason I here over and over again is "I have no time". No disrespect but let's get real! We all have time, if we make it a priority! Your health and quality of life is worth putting at the top of your "To Do" list. Think about it: Will you have time when you are unable to function? Will you have time when you are diagnosed with a chronic disease that may now be permanent? This is the only life you will have. What do you want it to be? What is your vision?

How to create YOUR vision?

A vision is a compelling statement of who you are and what health promoting, life-giving behaviors you want to do **consistently**.

What does it look like?

How will you feel?

What are the most important elements of your vision (health, family, love, etc.)?

What do you value most about yourself and your life?

Rewrite your story!!!!

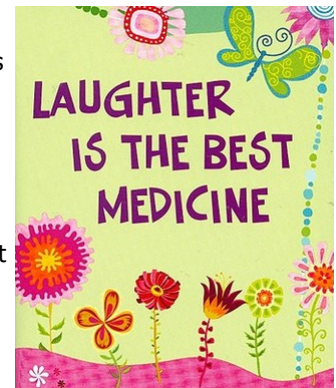


EXERCISE: no surprise! Its one of the most important things to do to combat stress. The physical stress you put on your body through exercise can relieve mental stress! Endorphins are released which improves your mood and acts as a natural painkiller. Physical activity improves sleep quality and can help you feel more confident in your body, promoting mental wellbeing. Find something you enjoy that you can make routine: walking/jogging, dancing, cycling, even yoga.



LAUGHING: It's hard to feel anxious when you are laughing. Laughing relieves your stress response (fight-or-flight) and can relieve tension in your body by relaxing your muscles. It improves your immune system and mood in the long-run.

"The effects of laughter and exercise are very similar and combining laughter and movement, like waving your arms, is a great way to boost your heart rate." (WebMD) The benefits of laughter can also be attributed to having a good sense of humor, a positive attitude, and the support of friends and family. Watch a funny TV show or hang out with friends who make you laugh.



AVOID PROCRASTINATION: Another way to avoid stress is to stay on top of your priorities. Procrastination is not something you are born with, it's something you learn. That means changing is possible. It can cause you to act reactively, meaning you are always trying to "catch up". This can certainly cause you stress. Get in the habit of making a to-do list organized by priority. If it's something important that you keep putting off because you are not comfortable with it or not sure you can successfully complete it, don't be ashamed to ask for assistance.



If possible, give yourself chunks of uninterrupted time so you can stay focused on one thing. (Multi-tasking is really an illusion. You may think you are multi-tasking, however, most often you are not doing two things at once but instead individual actions in rapid succession. Only 2.5% of people are able to multitask effectively.)



Ways to Help Reduce Stress Naturally (continued from page 3)

HUG YOUR PET: Having a pet may help reduce stress and improve your mood (state of mind). Interacting with pets may help release oxytocin, a brain chemical that promotes positive mood.

Having a pet may also help relieve stress by giving you purpose, keeping you active and providing companionship*, all qualities that help reduce anxiety sometimes associated with stress.



*Social isolation and loneliness can increase risk for a variety of physical and mental conditions, high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer’s disease, and even death. (www.nia.nih.gov)

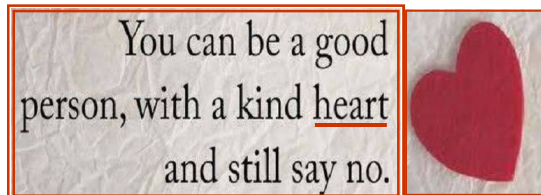


Which leads into the next stress-reducer, **SPEND TIME WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY:** The key concept here is “social support”! Being part of a friend network can give you a sense of belonging and self-worth, which can help you in tough times.

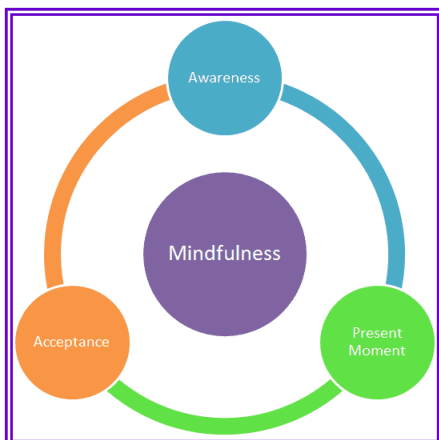
One study found that for women in particular, spending time with friends and children helps release oxytocin (chemical in the brain, as noted before, that is a natural stress reliever). This effect is called “tend and befriend”, and is the opposite of the fight-or-flight response.

Another study found that men and women with the fewest social connections were more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety. (www.healthline.com)

LEARN TO SAY “NO”: If you find yourself taking on more than you know you can handle (and is beyond a healthy expectation), and you find yourself overwhelmed making it difficult to complete anything successfully, its time to push back and learn to say no. If you are not in a position to say those words, you should be in a position to re-evaluate your list of “priorities” and realize something has to be dropped from the list.



Put your ego aside because it loves to whisper such things as “*You can’t let them see you fail. You have to handle it ALL.*” NOTICE— Do you feel butterflies in your stomach? Do you have a sinking feeling or like a weight is on your shoulders? That’s your gut telling you to **S.T.O.P.** (**S**tep back, **T**hink, **O**rganize your thoughts & needed behaviors, then **P**roceed). Don’t listen to your head (ego), listen to your gut (microbiome)!



PRACTICE MINDFULNESS: We tend to focus on what has already occurred and what is perceived to be in store for our future. This way of thinking causes undo stress and prevents you from enjoying what you have. We cannot change what has already happened. We have little or no control over the future. Realize that with all the stress you are creating in thought, you are impacting your health...chances are you might not even be here to witness what actually happens. We waste precious energy and valuable time worrying at the expensive of our well-being!

Mindfulness encourages us to be here NOW and to notice thoughts that arise throughout the day that either help meet your goals or get in the way of doing what you want.

Don’t go through life on autopilot, detached from your experiences. Realize right **now** is all you have. Don’t ignore life’s “present”! Take notice.

See the next page for some ways to increase your mindfulness while reducing stress and ultimately increasing heart-health.

Some Mindfulness Practices

Health does not always come from medicine. Most of the time it comes from peace of mind, peace in the heart, peace in the soul. It comes from laughter and love.

Yoga—Take a yoga class or watch a video on YouTube. Yoga styles differ; some even like it hot! No matter how you slice (or bend ☺) it, the common goal is to connect the body and mind. Studies have shown that yoga can enhance mood and may even be as effective as antidepressant drugs. Although more studies are needed to fully understand how yoga reduces stress and anxiety, what is known is that it has a calming effect on one's nervous system and 'fight-or-flight' response. It may help lower cortisol levels, blood pressure and heart rate and increase gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), a neurotransmitter that is lowered in mood disorders.

Deep Breathing—This practice goes hand-in-hand with yoga. Where mental stress activates the sympathetic nervous system causing fight-or-flight response which I have already mentioned, deep breathing, on the other hand, activates the parasympathetic nervous system which controls the relaxation response. There are many types of deep breathing exercises, including diaphragmatic breathing, paced respiration, etc. They each bring deeper awareness to the breath, slowing it down and making it deeper and more focused. This slows the heart rate, allowing feelings of peacefulness.

Journaling—Doesn't have to be fancy, a simple notebook and pen will do. You don't need to follow any rules. Use it as a tool to capture what you are feeling, hearing, seeing, appreciating at the moment. You can take a few minutes after exercising or a yoga class to reflect on what you experienced. Just before settling in to sleep, recall three to five things that happened that day which you are most thankful/proud/excited about. Perhaps this is the time to give your creative self a chance to shine. Journaling can lead right into **Meditation**. For many the thought of meditating can be scary, seem impossible to achieve or just too "foofoo" for them. That's fair but if you are the least bit curious, it might be worth trying. It's basically allowing yourself to be silent. The thoughts will still come but you will learn to just acknowledge them, allowing them to come and go without attaching to any one thought. This takes practice, practice, practice. But I can tell you first hand, it is worth the effort. There are many free apps out there now that make it very easy. I like "Insight Timer" but there are so many others: Calm, Smiling Mind, Stop, Breathe & Think, 10% Happier, etc. Find one that works for you and just try. If you can hang in there for 10 days, I guarantee you'll start seeing a positive shift in your thoughts and in your life!

Final note on stress according to Dr. Wayne Dyer: "The truth is there is no actual stress or anxiety in the world; it's your thoughts that create these false beliefs." Dr. Dyer believes we are all here to experience joy. But our stressful thoughts get in the way, preventing feelings of happiness and self-worth.

Change your thoughts and you change the way you see your life! Change the way you see your life and you reduce stress. Reduce stress and you can prevent many chronic diseases. We are hard-wired to see, think and believe the negative. However, the more aware of our thoughts, by being in the moment, breathing and showing self-compassion, we can eliminate the anxiety for at least the next few moments, or perhaps even hours and days. The power to "re-program" your mind to see the positive first is within you. Once again, the choice is yours. Remember your vision. What is most important to you? Take care of yourself now so you can live your story and love every minute of it!

Mexican Lentil Soup



Taken from:

**THE
GAME
CHANGERS**



Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large carrot, peeled and diced small
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3 celery stalks, diced small
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Nutrition Facts

Amount Per Serving

Calories:	363.2
Protein:	21.3g
Total Fat:	1.8g
Sat. fat:	0.25g
Trans fat:	<0.01g
Cholesterol:	0mg
Total Carbohydrate:	67.4g
Dietary Fiber:	11.7g
Total Sugars:	7.64g
Added Sugars:	0g
Sodium:	363.2mg

- 2 chipotles in adobo, minced, plus 2 tablespoons adobo sauce from the can
- 3 cups lentils
- 1 large russet potato, peeled and diced small
- 1 (15-ounce) can diced tomatoes, not drained
- 10 cups vegetable stock
- 3 tablespoons minced cilantro
- 2 limes, quartered

Directions:

1. Heat a large soup pot or saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the oil and sauté the carrot, onion, celery, and garlic for 5 to 7 minutes.
2. Add the cumin, oregano, salt, and pepper, and stir. Then add the chipotle chiles and sauté for 2 minutes. Add the adobo sauce, lentils, potato, tomatoes and their juice, vegetable stock, and cilantro, and bring to a boil.
3. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook, covered, for 40 to 50 minutes. The lentils should remain intact and still have their shape, but be cooked through.

Tip:

If you overcook the lentils, don't worry! Just pulse them with an immersion blender or in a regular blender and enjoy as a smooth puréed soup.

Adding some steamed rice can help make this bowl even more satisfying.

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