Staying Stress-Free for a Heart That's Healthy:
Stress and Your Heart

What is stress?

Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from difficult circumstances. Typically, the emotional signs of stress are frustration, anxiety, and oversensitivity. Stress can be caused by problems with work, friends, money, or family. It can be good when it helps motivate people to do things, but long-term stress is always bad, especially when it becomes overwhelming. It can cause many different physical and mental problems.

How does stress impact me?

If you experience stress for a short period of time, you may have stomach pains, frustration, anxiety, raised blood pressure, or a faster heart rate. If stress ends after a short period of time, the problems can stop.

Long-term, or chronic, stress is much more harmful. You may not realize that you are under long-term stress if you have many different pressures, but long-term stress can cause many physical problems. If you experience chronic stress, you may have:
- Headaches,
- Dizziness,
- A bad stomach,
- Sleep problems, and
- Sexual difficulty.

Long-term stress can also cause high blood pressure and blood sugar (when your body is stressed, your body can't produce enough insulin, which causes your blood sugar levels to increase), which can lead to heart attacks and other heart problems.

How does long-term stress impact my heart?

Stress has a complicated link to heart health. Too much stress can lead to artery damage and high blood pressure. It can also cause you to drink too much alcohol or smoke cigarettes, which are both bad for your heart.

What do I do to manage my stress?

Sometimes, you can manage short-term stress by solving the problem that is causing you stress. For example, if you are experiencing stress because you have not had a job for a short period of time, but then you find a job, your stress may end.

However, long-term stress is more difficult to handle. People who manage both short-term and long-term stress well usually have supportive friends and family and are flexible and hopeful. It helps to let go of stress by talking to others, crying, writing, and expressing your feelings. You can also cope with stress by:
- Exercising,
- Getting enough sleep,
- Relaxing,
- Doing activities that you enjoy
- Managing your time well, and
- Eating healthy foods.

Finally, if you finish something challenging, rewarding yourself with a treat or fun activity can help. If you cannot handle stress alone, it is important to call friends, family, or your GP or counsellor for advice.