

Heart Healthy Tips: Medical Care, Physical Activity and Stress Management

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Physical activity, stress management and standard medical care combine to make the best heart healthy wellness plan. Since heart disease is a leading cause of mortality this prescription is good health promotion advice for everyone. February is National Heart Health Month so let's look more closely at these three components and tips for developing a heart healthy wellness routine.

In a new study, people with heart disease who along with their routine medical care worked out, or took a stress management class, fared better than those who didn't. The results suggest "considerable benefit" from exercise and stress management training, write the researchers from Duke University. Not only did physical activity and stress management lower markers of heart disease, but they were also associated with a reduction in emotional distress. In short, their hearts became healthier, and their mental and emotional states improved.

So what is the best exercise program? For older adults who want to stay healthy and independent, the National Institute on Health recommends balancing four key areas for a well-rounded physical fitness program:

- **Endurance:** builds your aerobic capacity, gives you more freedom of movement, and strengthens your heart, allowing you to stay active for longer periods of time.
- **Strength:** builds muscles and increases your metabolism, which helps to keep your weight and blood sugar in check as well as improves overall functional capacity.
- **Balance:** builds leg muscles, core strength and maintains independence by helping you prevent falls and improve overall balance.
- **Stretching:** helps maintain flexibility, range of motion and eases joint stiffness.

And what are the best stress management techniques? To help build emotional heart health, experts recommend taking a few minutes everyday to practice relaxation techniques including:

- **Breathing:** learning proper breathing exercises for relaxation is easy and usually only takes a few simple instructions from a good teacher.
- **Meditation:** setting aside a few minutes to quiet your mind is like taking a mini-vacation. Prayer, visualization and guided imagery have also shown to reduce stress.
- **Attitude:** your thinking largely drives your emotions and behavior. Practice positive thinking and use affirmations to build a better attitude.

All too often, we forget to take good care of ourselves and over the long run this neglect can lead to health problems. For overall wellness and the best heart health, medical experts first suggest regular visits to your primary health care provider. The next step is to participate in moderate level physical activity thirty minutes most everyday including a variety of fitness activities. And last but not least, integrate stress management techniques into your daily routine. Combining these components will give you a personal wellness plan for better overall heart health. Now, the hard part, and I know you have heard this somewhere before, Just Do It! It is National Heart Health Month and that should be good motivation, and a great reason to start today.