



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Mind/Body Connection: Getting to the Heart of It

By Diane Mayes, MA, LMHC, CWPC
Contact at: dmayes@fchn.com

With Valentine's Day right around the corner, February is traditionally celebrated as the month of love and all things heart related. Beginning in 1964, nine years after having a heart attack, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared February as American Heart Month in order to bring attention to one of the leading causes of death in the United States.

While you might be aware of the positive impact living a healthy lifestyle has on your heart health, have you considered how mental health and the heart are interconnected? Are you familiar with the expressions "you nearly gave me a heart attack," "I was worried to death," or "it broke my heart"? Did you consider the actual mind/body connection to these phrases?

The Head and Heart Connection

It is important to be aware of the head-heart connection. Research shows that negative states of mind, including depression, anxiety, anger and chronic stress may influence your risk of heart disease over time, or worsen heart issues that already exist.

- Research shows that while approximately 20 percent of us experience an episode of depression in our lifetimes, the figure climbs to 50 percent among people with heart disease.

- Heart disease patients with anxiety are twice as likely to die within three years of a cardiac event.
- Heart disease patients are three times as likely to be depressed. For those newly diagnosed with heart disease, depression increases the risk that a harmful heart-related event will occur within that year.
- Even in people with no prior heart disease, major depression doubles the risk of dying from heart-related causes.

Negative emotions may also affect lifestyle habits, which in turn can increase heart disease risk. For example, people who are chronically stressed, anxious, depressed or angry may be more likely to drink too much alcohol, smoke, overeat and get less exercise — all unhealthy habits that are bad for your heart.

The American Heart Association recommends that heart patients should be routinely screened for depression. Additionally, a new emotion-based approach to heart health, called cardiac psychology, focuses on the mental health needs of cardiac patients. It promotes tools, like stress management and psychotherapy, to help patients cope with their disease.

Tips for Keeping Healthy Mind and Heart

With a better appreciation of how emotion is linked to the heart, you can focus on staying positive, use strategies to cope with chronic stress, and form positive connections in your life. Managing daily stressors and increasing your happiness is crucial to the health of both mind and body.

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Show Your Heart and Mind Some Love with These Tips

- **Talk to your doctor.** Schedule an annual physical or preventive check-up to maintain a relationship with your doctor, and to discuss how you're feeling, both mentally and physically.
- **Recognize your feelings and express them.** Talk to loved ones, write in a journal or join a support group. Seek professional help if you need it.
- **Manage stress** with daily mindful meditation, yoga or deep breathing exercises.
- **Avoid heavy drinking, and don't smoke or vape.**
- **Exercise.** Try a 30-minute brisk walk, swimming, cycling, gardening or dancing.
- **Eat a healthy diet** with plenty of omega-3 fatty acids, which have anti-inflammatory effects.
- **Foster an optimistic outlook.** Practice self-compassion, take time to laugh and find humor in your day, notice the good things around you, and focus on things you can control, pay it forward and compliment someone to keep that positive energy going.
- **Practice gratitude.** Write in a gratitude journal, or ask yourself daily "What am I grateful for?" to bring awareness and appreciation for positives within and around us.
- **Maintain meaningful social connections.** Staying connected to others helps to fight off loneliness, and reduce stress.
- **Catch some Zzzs.** Try to get 7 to 8 hours of sleep nightly. Set a sleep schedule, follow a nightly routine to prepare for bedtime, turn off electronics 30-60 minutes before bedtime, avoid caffeine, and/or practice relaxation techniques including: meditation, mindfulness or guided imagery to drift off to sleep.

Remember the head and heart connection. Don't ignore emotions or moods that can overwhelm your life, like chronic stress, anxiety, depression and anger. Find ways to take care of your emotional well-being and your heart will thank you.

Contact Your EAP for Support

First Choice Health EAP is here to help navigate stressful and uncertain life events, and celebrate the positives as well. For counseling referrals and work/life support, call us 24/7 at (800) 777-4114. Mental health assessments, webinars, health videos and more can be found on our website at www.firstchoiceEAP.com.

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