

## Love your Heart Control Your Stress

Stress is a reaction to a situation where a person feels threatened or anxious. Learning healthy ways to cope and getting the right care and support can help reduce stressful feelings and symptoms.

After a traumatic event, people may have strong and lingering reactions. These events may include personal or environmental disasters or threats with an assault. The symptoms may be physical or emotional. Common reactions to stress may include:

- Disbelief, shock, and numbness
- Feeling sad, frustrated, and helpless
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions.
- Headaches, back pains, and stomach problems.

There are three major types of stress.

**Acute or short-term stress.** This can be good or bad. Good stress like a marriage or a run down a ski slope. Bad stress such as stopped in bumper-to-bumper traffic or running late for an appointment.

**Episodic stress.** This occurs frequently particularly in individuals who tend to be worriers and those who have a Type A perfectionist personality.

**Chronic stress.** This happens when people see no way out of a situation such as a traumatic event or long-term health issues.

Many diseases and conditions can be linked to stress including depression, cardiovascular disease, asthma, weakened immune system, slow healing wound, and/or upper respiratory infections.

Anger, fear, and sadness are emotional responses to stress that can affect your cardiovascular system such as high blood pressure. Increased anxiety and grief have been associated with cardiac events including heart attacks. Obesity has also been linked to stress because negative moods may lead to seeking comfort foods to feel better or eating more when being upset. Sleep is also affected by stress. Loss of sleep can make us prone to accidents, our ability to perform daily activities and can affect our hear.

Feeling emotional and nervous or having trouble sleeping and eating can all be normal reactions to stress. Here are some healthy ways you can deal with stress:

- **Take care of yourself.** Eating healthy, exercise, get plenty of sleep, and give yourself a break if you feel stressed out.
- **Talk to others.** Share your problems and how you are feeling and coping with a parent, friend, counselor, doctor, or pastor.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** These may help, but they can create additional problem and increase the stress you are already feeling.
- **Take a break.** If news events are causing your stress, take a break from listening or watching the news.
- **Recognize when you need more help.** If problems continue or you are thinking about suicide, talk to a psychologist, social worker, or professional counselor.

Source: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Express Health Talks - Stress