

STRESS | SPIRITUALITY | SIMPLICITY: Soothing the Heart!

Medicine is both an art and a science. The scientific progress of medicine has been breathtaking in its successes but there is still so much we don't understand about the human body and mind. Each year my wife Mitra, a Life Coach (embracethelimitlessyou.com) and Pranic (energy) healer takes me to an uplifting authors conference entitled 'I Can Do It'. These sessions reinforce in me the powerful healing our body can do often without the aid of drugs or devices.

In clinical research we compare new treatments to a 'placebo' arm to see the true difference. We do this in part because there is always benefit in the placebo arm, a clear demonstration of the power our own minds have upon healing. I have seen repeatedly in my practice two patients with similar heart conditions but the one with the more positive outlook on life always seems to do better.

Our world is becoming increasingly complex, our societies are undergoing rapid transformations and our values are constantly being challenged. This leads to tremendous stress which can have a detrimental effect on the heart. The autonomic nervous system that controls our 'fight or flight' response is put on high alert (sympathetic overload). Our adrenal glands release high doses of cortisol and adrenaline. This leads to the heart rate, blood pressure and respiratory rate going up. Blood vessels constrict, the blood itself thickens and the potential for heart attacks, stroke and death rises significantly.

We can take many steps to reverse this process. Let me outline a few examples to consider. ***Deep breathing exercises***, through yoga, meditation, tai chi or hypnosis help to slow down the heart rate and calm the body. Even as little as 15 minutes a day has been shown to be beneficial.

Relaxation through massage therapy, exercise, music, craft work or other hobbies will do wonders for the heart by raising levels of healing

hormones such as endorphins and serotonin.

Socialization in church groups, community centers or other venues increases oxytocin (the 'love' hormone) levels and provides a sense of well being and self worth.

Pets, especially dogs, demonstrate an unconditional love that is worth emulating in our own lives. Owners of pets have less heart attacks and also heal faster after a heart attack.

Many studies have looked at the power of ***prayer and spiritual thinking***. They have repeatedly shown benefit in mending the heart and other illnesses.

Mindfulness is defined as "a moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness." This type of therapy has been shown to reduce stress, improve health, work performance and education.

While many of these approaches can be done on your own, the help of others can often speed up the path to recovery. Expertise from psychologists and certified life coaches, touch (reiki), energy (pranic) healers, biofeedback therapists and of course physicians willing to incorporate complementary techniques into the art of medicine are all valuable resources in our quest to stay healthy and healed!

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