

## Health news for a healthy heart

Written by Brandi D. Phillips

Thursday, 10 September 2009 16:09

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There are many different things that can affect the health of a person's heart -Optimism can help, loneliness can hurt. This article discusses the former and latter.

### *Optimism May Lower the Risk of Heart Disease in Women*

In a study published the week of August 10, 2009 in the Journal of the American Heart Association, women 50 and over who have a more optimistic approach to life in comparison to the "glass half empty" approach, are less likely to get heart disease . . . In her article, Heather Mayer quotes Dr. Hilary Tindle, an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh, in Pennsylvania. "In the grand scheme of things, the real importance is recognizing and raising awareness of the link between attitude and health," she said. Tindle also adds that pessimism may be as bad as having high blood pressure – a well known heart risk factor – when it comes to cardiovascular health.

Mayer noted in her article on cnn.com, optimists in general experience less stress than pessimists, tend to assess the situation, deal with the situations head on, and find adequate support to solve concerns, whereas pessimists do not handle situations the same. In her research, Dr. Tindle and her fellow researchers found that pessimists were also more likely to be at risk for other health concerns such as being overweight and a sedentary life style, although once these factors were corrected, mood also was still a factor in the pessimists risk for heart disease.

In contrast, Dr. Kirk Garratt, who works at Lenox Hill Hospital in the Cardiac Unit, says "Nobody has a clear cut answer, but there's a strong sense that attitude impacts physiology.

### *Loneliness May Hurt a Heart*

On August 10, 2009, Ray Hanier reported that research shows being lonely can break your heart, literally. He reported that people who lack a close, trusting support network from family or friends are more likely to develop and die from heart disease. Dr. John Cacioppo, PhD., . . . says, "We found fairly quickly that objective social isolation in everyday life isn't as important as perceived social isolation".

This means that feeling alone can be just as bad for the heart as physically isolating yourself from others. The feeling of being lonely leads to stress and through research, stress has been proven to lead to heart disease. Hanier notes, in the past, researchers have defined loneliness as the difference between a person's desired and actual social relationships and interactions in these relationships.

The definition of loneliness may differ from person to person. Some people are considered to be "loners", because they like to spend a lot of time alone. Others like to spend time with one or two friends, while there are still others who like to be around many people most of the time. So, it is important to distinguish between choosing to socially isolate from others based on need for space, and feeling alone, which is a lack of a close, trusting, and even emotionally intimate relationship with another human being.

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Dr. Cacioppo, states "The brains of lonely people are on high alert for social threats." This level of alertness releases a hormone called cortisol, which is related to stress, which in turn leads to strain on the cardiovascular system.

So, in conclusion, stay optimistic and try building close trusting relationships with others. Doing so may lead to less stress, thus less heart disease and possibly death.

Mayoclinic.com is a good website to obtain information about having a healthy heart and diet. If you have any questions or concerns about maintaining a healthy heart, contact your health care professional or local library or search the Internet for more information.

*Brandi Phillips is a Life Skills Therapist, Personal Trainer and Professional Dancer. Her goal is to cultivate healthy children and sustain healthy seniors.*

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### **CORRECTION:**

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Insight acknowledges the misprint of Dr. Curry's name in last week's diabetes article by Brandi Phillips. The name should read Dr. Endea J. Curry.