Stress Management

Understanding and coping with feelings you may have after your heart problem
What feelings did you experience after you were first told you had a heart problem?

Are you still experiencing them?
This is Not Unusual! Why?

- Frightening event
- Progressive/chronic illness
- Feeling like an invalid / being treated differently
- Employment/financial worries
- Medication side effects
- Making lifestyle changes
How Should You React?

- There are no rules!
- Everyone is different and will experience a different journey with different feelings at different times.
Symptoms?

- How do you recognise if you are stressed?
- What feelings do you get?
Physical

- Palpitations
- Rapid breathing
- Neck and shoulder pain
- Back pain
- Clammy or tingly hands and feet
Emotional

- Forgetful
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of confidence
- Problems sleeping
- Tearful
Behavioural

- Bad tempered
- Irritable
- Not listening
- Mood swings
- Unhealthy lifestyle
Stress Can be Good!

- We all need some stress in our lives
- But too much stress can be harmful
- Each of us has to decide when stress is too much as we all have a different level of stress tolerance
The Science Bit

- What is happening inside the body to produce all these feelings?

- The Fight or Flight Response

- Imagine crossing the road and a bus comes hurtling towards you..........................
ADRENALINE

Increased breathing, pulse and blood pressure

Blood sent to muscles and not to stomach, hands, feet and sexual organs

Release sugar and fats into bloodstream

Sweat to help cool down

Concentrate only on current situation and not on other “less important” things

All help you run away from the bus

WHAT IF THERE IS NO BUS TO RUN FROM AND THE STRESS RESPONSE HAS STILL BEEN TRIGGERED?
The Bottom Line

- Your heart has to work harder
- It can contribute to the furring up process in the arteries
So what can we do to reduce these effects?
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1. Avoid the things that make you stressed if possible

And

2. Change the way you react to the stresses that you can’t avoid
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Identify your stressor and your response

- Involve family, friends, partner
- Keep a stress diary
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Change what you can

- Manage your time
- Learn to say “no”
- Gather more information on your heart condition – to help build confidence
Psychological Reactions in Heart Patients

- 30% of patients – life is better than before
- 30% long term psychological damage
  Anxious/depressed “cardiac neurosis”
- 30% are “not the same”
  Say they are OK but partner says not
• Fear of activity
• Fear of excitement
• Give up enjoyed hobbies
• Wont travel too far from home
• Reduce work output – retire early
• Quieter than before
Common Misconceptions – not true!

- People with a heart condition should take life easy
- Heart conditions are caused by a worn out heart
- Angina causes permanent damage to the heart
Misconceptions Can Lead to Poor Coping Actions

- Heart has been worn out by stress or overwork, coping action = avoid any excitement, to avoid further risk

- Result = a disabled lifestyle
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Accept what you can’t change
- Don’t let it get to you!
- Take a positive approach
- Change how you see it / feel about it / react to it
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- Reduce the effects on your body
- Physical activity and exercise
- Healthy eating
- Avoid stimulants
- Relaxation and hobbies
- Support and help
Who Can Help?

- Cardiac Rehab Team – relaxation course
- Support groups – buddy helpline
- Family and friends
- Time to talk
- NHS self help guides – see http://www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/selfhelp/ to read or download guides
Self Help Guides

- Abuse
- Alcohol
- Anxiety
- Bereavement
- Controlling anger
- Depression
- Domestic violence
- Eating disorders

- Health anxiety
- Panic
- Post-traumatic stress
- Shyness/social anxiety
- Sleeping problems
- Stress
Normal breathing should involve the diaphragm pulling air down to the base of the lungs.

Anxiety and/or heart conditions can cause us to use the muscles at the top of the shoulders and neck.

This results in aching shoulders/neck and shallow faster breathing.
Relaxed breathing

- So relaxed or diaphragmatic breathing is at the heart of most relaxation techniques.
- If you have changed your breathing pattern it will take practice and time to get it back to normal.