

Prevent, Halt & Reverse Heart Disease

Angerer of the University of Munich in Germany followed 150 people with diseased arteries and found that over a two-year period the subjects who reported high levels of expressed anger, particularly those with low levels of social support, were significantly more likely to have their coronary heart disease worsen. In addition, Dr. Murray Mittleman and associates at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston reported that the risk of a heart attack increased in the two hours following an episode of anger, suggesting that anger was a trigger that doubled and even tripled the risk of heart attack.

How does chronic anger penalize the heart? No one is certain, but it is thought that high levels of stress hormones injure the coronary artery walls and over time provide deposit sites for artery-clogging cholesterol. These hormones can also stimulate arterial inflammation, blood clotting and high blood pressure, and evoke potentially lethal heart rhythms.

ANGER AND HOSTILITY: KNOW YOUR PERSONALITY, KNOW YOUR RISK

The following test, from the Arnot Ogden Medical Center, will help you to assess your general tendency to “fly off the handle.” You will score a value of “1” if the statement is never true for you, “2” if it’s rarely or sometimes true, “3” if it’s often true and “4” if it’s always true. Circle the appropriate number and add up your scores to find your total.

NEVER	RARELY	OFTEN	ALWAYS
1	2	3	4
It doesn't take much to get me mad.			
1	2	3	4
People tell me I should calm down.			
1	2	3	4
I blow up at terrible drivers.			
1	2	3	4
If I am upset, I'll take it out on the dog or the cat.			

STEP 1: ASSESS YOUR RISK

1	2	3	4
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People call me hotheaded.

1	2	3	4
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I'm furious about the way I get treated at restaurants or stores.

1	2	3	4
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When others' mistakes slow me down, I'm upset all day.

1	2	3	4
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If the situation is bad enough, I'll throw things.

1	2	3	4
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I swear loudly to blow off steam.

1	2	3	4
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I feel like hitting someone who makes me very angry.

1	2	3	4
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I've been told I have a bad temper.

1	2	3	4
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If you embarrass me in front of someone, I'll be furious.

1	2	3	4
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I'm a very ambitious person, so sometimes I get impatient and angry with other people.

1	2	3	4
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I've been known to break things when I'm frustrated.

If you scored 18 or below on this test, you have a high temper threshold and are able to stay calm in situations that would frustrate many others. This is a big help in managing your stress levels. If you scored 19 to 27, you get angry about as often as most other people. If you scored 28 to 35, there's a good possibility that you're under too much stress, or it may be that getting angry has become a habit; take this score seriously and begin to make changes now, before it adversely affects your health.

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If you scored over 35 on the test and continue with the same behaviors and attitudes, you risk serious stress-related disease. It may be helpful to speak to a counselor about ways to deal with your anger.

Depression

Doctors have associated heart attacks and clinical depression for some time, usually in that sequence. After all, who wouldn't be depressed after a heart attack? But new research is showing that depression may actually be a *cause* of the attack.

- Depression has been reported to precede a heart attack in up to 50% of cases.

- Depression has also been associated with an increased number of cardiovascular events after an initial heart attack or following coronary bypass surgery. In two landmark studies, patients who were depressed were three to five times more likely to die during the first year after suffering a heart attack than were nondepressed patients.

- A study of about 4,500 elderly people free of coronary disease found that the risk of heart disease and death increased by 40% and 60%, respectively, for those who became depressed when compared with those who did not become depressed.

- Scientists at the Johns Hopkins Medical Centers found that, all else being equal, people who have some depression symptoms are twice as likely to suffer heart attacks as those with no symptoms, and people diagnosed with major depression were 4.5 times as likely.

- After a person suffers angina or a heart attack, depression is a better predictor of prognosis than many other known risk factors for heart disease.

- According to a recent report, depression produces a greater decrement in health than many chronic diseases, including anginal chest pain. However, the presence of depression and any medical condition incrementally worsens that condition. The bottom line? Depression is very disabling.

One reason for the link between depression and cardiac risk is that depression contributes to poor lifestyle choices. Depressed people are more apt to eat poorly, be sedentary, drink, smoke and use drugs. Depressed