

# FEBRUARY is *heart* MONTH

*Stay young at heart!*

## Heart health: the importance of stress management

According to Health Canada, as many as 11 million Canadians are experiencing high stress levels in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since February is Heart Month, here's a look at the impact of stress on heart health and what you can do to manage it.

### HOW STRESS AFFECTS YOUR HEART

Sudden intense stress causes a spike in heart rate and blood pressure, which can trigger a heart attack, especially if you have a pre-existing condition or risk

factors for heart disease. While the effects aren't as immediate, chronic stress can also put a strain on your heart, elevate your blood pressure and increase your risk of heart disease.

Fortunately, according to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, nearly 80 per cent of premature heart disease and stroke cases can be prevented by adopting healthy lifestyle habits, including proper stress management.

### HEALTHY WAYS TO MANAGE STRESS

Many people smoke, drink alcohol or eat junk food as a way to cope with stress. Unfortunately, these behaviours have a negative effect on your heart health. Here are some healthy ways to lower your stress level:

- Get seven to nine hours of sleep every night
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes every day
- Spend time with friends and family members
- Practise yoga, meditation and

- deep breathing exercises
- Find creative outlets such as journaling or painting
- Regularly visit parks, beaches, hiking trails and other natural settings
- Take breaks from using social media
- Speak with a mental health professional

For more information about how to reduce your risk of heart disease, visit [heartandstroke.ca](http://heartandstroke.ca).



## The risk factors and symptoms of heart failure

Did you know that approximately 600,000 Canadians live with heart failure? This February, in honour of Heart Month, the Heart and Stroke Foundation is focusing its efforts on raising awareness about this condition. Here's what you should know.

### RISK FACTORS

Heart failure is a condition that develops after the heart becomes damaged or weakened. The term doesn't mean the heart has failed or stopped working. Rather, it refers to a heart that works inefficiently and doesn't pump blood as well as it should.

This condition often affects people with high blood pressure or who've had a heart attack. However, several other conditions and lifestyle habits are linked to heart failure, including:

- Heart valve disease

- Myocarditis
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Obesity
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes

In addition, individuals who are 65 and older have an increased risk of being diagnosed with heart failure because aging can weaken and stiffen the heart.

### SYMPTOMS

The most common signs of heart failure include:

- Difficulty breathing, especially when

- lying down
- Rapid weight gain (two kilograms or more in less than a week)
- Bloating or a feeling of fullness
- Severe fatigue
- Changes in appetite
- Swelling in the abdomen, feet, ankles, legs and lower spine
- Increased urge to urinate overnight

Visit your doctor right away if you experience any of these symptoms. For more information, visit [heartandstroke.ca](http://heartandstroke.ca)

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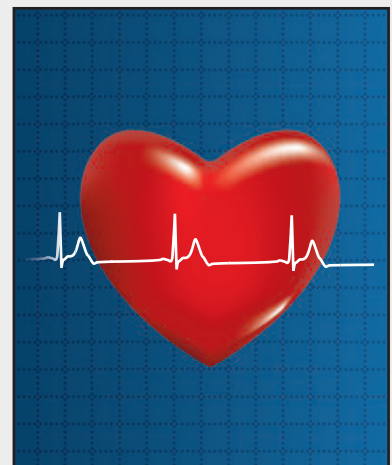
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