

PARISH NURSE'S NOOK

Stress Events Can Harm Your Heart

There are several events and situations that place you at a significantly higher risk of having a heart attack. You may not have thought of these events as causes of heart attack but they do exist. This list is in addition to the age, race, cholesterol, smoking, etc. causes you have heard about in the past by the American Heart Association.

The new list includes:

- **First Thing in the Morning.** The risk of heart attack increases 40% in the morning. Why? As you awaken the body secretes adrenaline and other stress hormones, which increase blood pressure and make a greater demand for oxygen. The blood is thicker and more difficult to pump because of the dehydration that occurred overnight. To prevent, do not jump out of bed. Set your alarm a bit early so you can “hit the snooze button” and awaken more slowly.
- **Monday Mornings Are Dangerous.** About 20% more heart attacks occur on this day, probably because people are stressed about returning to work. Relax on Sunday but do not sleep in. Arising early on Monday morning after a restful weekend can raise your blood pressure to dangerous levels. Maintain a “normal” sleep/wake schedule all week.
- **During a Bowel Movement.** Straining increases pressure in the chest, slowing the return of blood to the heart. To prevent straining, increase the amount of fiber in your diet, drink more water and increase your exercise.
- **After a High Fat, Heavy Meal.** These foods constrict blood vessels causing blood to clot thus a heart artery blockage. To prevent, avoid this type meal or keep the portions small. A daily dose of aspirin (if approved by your physician) helps keep blood cells from becoming sticky.
- **Vigorous Exercise that You Are Not Prepared to Do.** Shoveling snow in the extreme cold is an exercise that causes many heart attacks each year. This type of exercise on an unconditioned body raises the blood pressure and heart rate to excessive levels. Do this type of work slowly and take frequent breaks. Get in condition.
- **Making a Speech.** The heart recognizes this duty much as it does the snow shoveling exercise in folks not used to talking or performing in front of groups of people. To prevent do small parts and practice may help overcome this stressor. Some folks experience the same stressors before an airplane trip.

Hopefully you have identified some heart stressors not usually thought about and can take steps to lessen or prevent them from becoming more severe.

I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul. 3 John 2

Additional Resources: www.heart.org, www.goredforwomen.org