

Stress poses heart health dangers for women

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Women tend to not only take on their own stress, but also that of their families. This compounds the potential health hazards that include both psychological and physical issues.

Women tend to use food to suppress the impact of stress, resulting in

increased weight and decreased exercise. When our weight increases and we have decreased exercise tolerance, the health-related heart risk factors can develop or worsen: Our blood pressure increases, cholesterol increases and the risk of developing diabetes increases.

Obesity, [high blood pressure](#), high cholesterol and diabetes are the leading risk factors for developing heart and cerebral vascular disease, such as a heart attack and stroke. Women of all ages are at risk, even those who still have not undergone menopause. If a woman is postmenopausal, then her risk is greater.

In addition, multiple studies have demonstrated that depression alone is a strong, [independent risk factor](#) for the development of heart disease and worse long-term outcomes if one has a heart-related event.

Women, unfortunately, are at greater risk of developing depression if their stress goes unrecognized and/or untreated. Women must not ignore symptoms of stress: [weight gain](#), fatigue, [mood swings](#), poor sleeping, heart racing, irritability and poor eating habits are among the most common.

If symptoms develop, try to identify what is triggering the stress and then implement changes to minimize the stress. This is not always easy. Talking to your family, friends, coworkers or a religious advisor may help.

Don't keep your worries bottled up inside yourself and believe they are going to go away. Chances are that they won't and things will only get worse. We want to avoid those potential health hazards as outlined above. Seek help. There are people out there who can help.

Provided by Rush University Medical Center

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