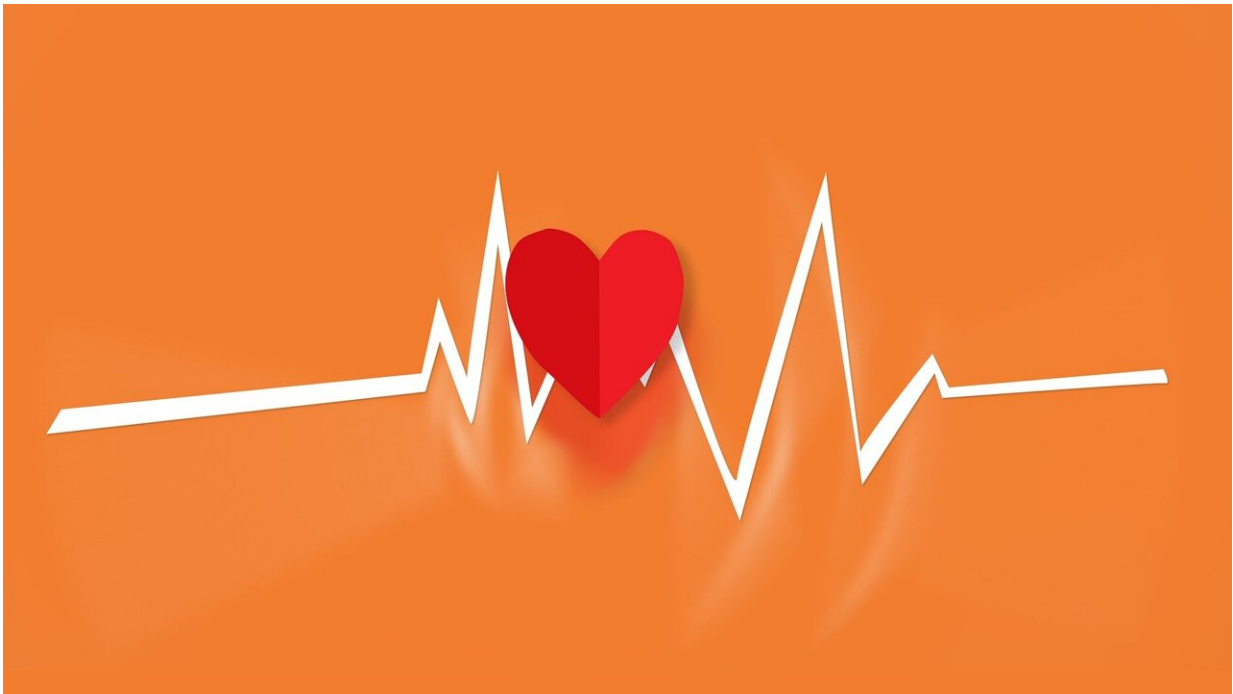


# Cutting costs shouldn't cost you your heart health

February 2 2023, by Graciela Gutierrez

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

As prices are in flux at the grocery store and elsewhere, Baylor College of Medicine cardiologists say not to let the threat of inflation lead you to make choices that could impact your heart health.

"This is a high stress time for some. Stress and the unhealthy lifestyle choices that usually go along with it, coupled with the [health](#) effects the

COVID-19 pandemic created over the past few years, could increase the risk for cardiovascular disease," said Dr. Christie Ballantyne, professor and chief of cardiovascular research at Baylor. "It is not a good idea to cut out a doctor's visit or medication to try to save money."

## **COVID-19, stress and your heart**

"Studies over the past few years have found an increase in cardiovascular related deaths. There are many factors that lead to poor cardiovascular health; however, COVID-19 and the shutdowns associated with the pandemic are believed to have played a role," Ballantyne said.

When the shutdowns began in early 2020, many people could not schedule regular in-person checkups or follow-up appointments with their doctors. Many deferred their treatment out of fear of contracting COVID-19. Since COVID-19 is more severe in people with other [health issues](#), those already with cardiovascular disease were more likely to have more severe outcomes. All this led to a decline in overall [heart health](#).

In addition, the stress for many during that time, whether it was from fear of illness or [job loss](#), along with quarantine and work-from-home, caused many to choose unhealthy activities. That included reaching for unhealthy comfort foods leading to weight gain, more [alcohol consumption](#) and/or smoking, less movement and lack of exercise, all of which, including high stress levels, increase the risk for cardiovascular disease.

## **The price of health**

While availability of appointments and fear of contracting COVID are not as big of issues as they were earlier in the pandemic, other concerns

have arisen, like inflation. Paying for doctor visits or prescription refills might be difficult for some as [high prices](#) elsewhere are hitting pocketbooks. However, Ballantyne says that rather than assuming you can't afford health care, talk to your provider and see what payment options can be worked out and whether less expensive medications are available.

For costly prescriptions, there could be a generic alternative or a combination of drugs that is offered at a lower cost. Another option might be getting a prescription for pills of twice the needed dosage and then cutting each pill in half to prolong the prescription.

"These tips won't work for everybody, so it is important to always seek a doctor's advice. You won't know about what can be done to help until you ask," Ballantyne said. "The most important thing right now is to see your doctor and communicate all your concerns and that includes cost concerns."

## **What can I do?**

There is always the option to increase healthy activity to help support the treatment plan you and your doctor decide on. Healthy lifestyle choices include exercising or moving more throughout the day, eating more fruits, vegetables and [lean meats](#), stopping smoking or vaping, developing tools and techniques for stress reduction instead of turning to [unhealthy foods](#) or habits, and learning about your family health history to share with your doctor to better assess your risk for [cardiovascular disease](#).

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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