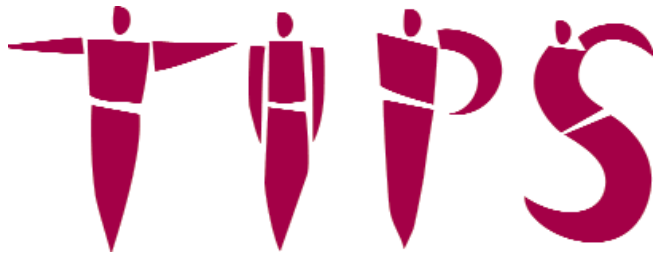


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Depression can Literally 'Break' Your Heart

If you assume that “broken hearts” are simply the stuff of poems, songs, or movies, you’re wrong. “There is a connection between depression and heart disease, and by understanding it, we can help break the cycle,” says Dr. Lawson Wulsin, author of *Treating the Aching Heart: A Guide to Depression, Stress, and Heart Disease*.

The statistics are unnerving. Depression affects roughly one in four people, as does heart disease, making each of them common in all population groups. Despite heart disease being the highest cause of death in the world, little has been written about the dangerous relationship between depression and heart disease. “Depression is the illness most likely to disable us,” explains Dr. Wulsin, “and heart disease is the illness most likely to kill us. Early recognition and treatment of *both* disorders in a single person can have broad healing effects...”

Although having depression does not guarantee that one will develop heart disease, depression increases the chances of developing coronary heart disease by about 75%, often through other predisposing conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

So what are the solutions? The good news is that treatments work

well. However, patients must also take personal responsibility to ensure they are doing everything possible to maximize their physical *and* mental health. Better understanding how the heart and brain are tied together both anatomically and physiologically can also help. The following are a few insights excerpted from Dr. Wulsin’s book:

- **Depression can affect your resting heart rate, which in turn can lead to heart disease.** An increased resting heart rate is associated with high blood pressure, high blood glucose, high blood lipids, and obesity, which are all major risk factors for atherosclerosis. When the sympathetic nervous system is overactive, and the parasympathetic system is underactive - which often happens in depression, one of the results is a high resting heart rate.
- **Blood pressure can play a critical role, too.** The same signals that make the heart beat faster make the arterial walls contract to raise blood pressure by producing higher levels of norepinephrine or

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Are YOU at Risk?

Have you ever suffered from depression? Half of all people with one episode of major depression will suffer a second episode — and 75% will have a third. This pattern of persistent or recurrent depression is more likely to hasten or worsen heart disease as opposed to only one or two brief episodes. The following are additional risk factors for depression, heart disease, or both:

- **Do you have a chronic medical condition?** People with diabetes or high blood pressure consistently report higher rates of depression than people with no chronic illness. In general, chronic illnesses roughly double the risk for depression. Moreover, people with diabetes have about twice the chance of being depressed as people without diabetes.
- **Do you have relatives with depression?** Like heart disease, depression runs in families. Patterns of extremes (either many relatives, or none) help predict risk.

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Healthy Recipe: Roasted Pears and Grapes

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups seedless red grapes
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 lemons, sliced
- 2/3 cup moscato (or other dessert wine)
- 1/2 vanilla bean
- 2 tablespoons apricot jam
- 3 firm, but ripe Bosc pears

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Calories per serving: 123
- Fat: 0 g.
- Protein: 0 g.
- Sodium: 4 mg.
- Carbohydrates: 31 g.
- Fiber: 2 g.
- Saturated fat: 0 g.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Place grapes in 11-by-17 baking dish.
3. Combine sugar, lemon juice, moscato, vanilla bean and apricot jam in bowl and stir until blended.
4. Pour over the grapes.
5. Cut pears in half and remove cores and seeds.
6. Snuggly place the pear halves, cut side up, into the grapes.
7. Bake until pears are tender, and the liquid around the grapes is thick and syrupy, about 50 minutes.
8. Serve pears with some grapes and their liquid spooned around them.

Serving size: 1/2 pear and grapes. ❖

LifestyleTIPS®

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Working with Difficult People

Work is difficult enough without having to deal with a grumpy boss, or a gossipy or obnoxious co-worker. The following are some ideas to build workplace harmony:

- **Accept others as they are.** No matter how hard you try, you cannot change another person. Trying to do so only leads to frustration and exhaustion. You can't change anyone but yourself. Giving up the fight to control others frees you to determine *your* response to work issues.
- **Set boundaries.** Acceptance doesn't mean you have to become a doormat, or tolerate disrespectful behavior. Instead, refuse to argue or engage in a power struggle with a colleague who wants to launch a debate and prove his/her way is right. The more often you set boundaries, the more you will promote an attitude of respect and not discord.
- **Keep a kind heart and an open mind.** If you feel yourself revving up for an argument, remove yourself from the situation to calm your nerves. Maintain an attitude of respect, and resolve issues rationally.
- **Look within.** When we love ourselves, we can more easily accept others as they are. When we feel hurt, rejected, or unloved, acceptance is difficult. ❖

Source: Chris Karcher, relationship and spirituality expert. Visit www.relationshipsofgrace.com.

Depression

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faster firing in the sympathetic nerves to the heart and the arteries. This lays the groundwork for the acceleration of atherosclerosis.

- **The conversation between the brain and the heart never ceases.** Although the cardiovascular system responds every second to shifts in the respiratory system and the endocrine system, the central nervous system wields the most sophisticated influence over the regulation of the heart and its vessels.

“Though we can't reduce our blood pressure or heart rate by telling our sympathetic nerves to relax, we can change the balance of activity in our autonomic nervous systems in a number of ways,” Dr. Wulsin advises. “*Moderate exercise*, such as walking, particularly if done regularly, reduces the activity of sympathetic nerves. *Regular meditation* also alters the balance of sympathetic and parasympathetic activity. *Some medications*, such as beta-blockers and antidepressants, modify the tone of the autonomic nervous system.” ❖

Are You at Risk?

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- **Are you a female?** Symptoms of a heart attack in women tend to feature palpitations, dizziness, nausea, and fatigue, symptoms that can often be mistaken for anxiety.
- **Do you smoke?** Smoking is bad for heart disease, but for people with a history of depression it's even worse. Studies have consistently shown that smokers report higher rates of depression than nonsmokers.
- **Are you physically inactive or obese?** Physical inactivity nearly doubles the risk for coronary disease. The link between depression and obesity is complex - however, depression may contribute to heart disease by exacerbating obesity, particularly when depression leads to binge eating. ❖

Source: "Treating the Aching Heart: A Guide to Depression, Stress, and Heart Disease," by Lawson R. Wulsin, MD, \$22.95, Vanderbilt University Press, ISBN: 978-0-8265-1561-2.
Editor's note: May is National Mental Health.