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SIMPLE STEPS TO REDUCE YOUR RISK OF HEART DISEASE

APA and SCPA Offer Tips for a Heart Healthy Lifestyle

Charleston, SC, February 10, 2014 – With all the focus on romance and love around Valentine’s Day, the most important aspect of the heart is often overlooked—its health. February is National Heart Month and a time when Americans should remember that there are simple steps they can take to reduce their risk of heart disease.

The American Psychological Association’s (APA) 2012 Stress in America™ survey found that 66 percent of Americans surveyed believe their stress has a moderate, strong or very strong impact on their physical health. Furthermore, nearly one-third of Americans say that a lack of will power stands in the way of change.

“Physical and mental health are inextricably linked, as is the case with heart health and stress,” Dr. Jeannine Monnier, South Carolina Psychological Association (SCPA) President said. “People tend to overlook their emotional state when worrying about major health issues such as heart problems and thus cope in unhealthy ways such as smoking, drinking or being inactive. In the long run such behavior will only exacerbate health problems. However, learning how to properly manage your stress has enormous physical and psychological benefits.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in every four deaths is caused by heart disease. Half of the men and almost two-thirds of the women who die suddenly of coronary heart disease have no previous symptoms. Even if you have no symptoms, you may still be at risk.

APA and SCPA offer these tips for a healthy heart:

Identify unhealthy behaviors that increase your risk of heart disease. No two people are alike and some treatment or risk-reduction strategies that work for one person may be inappropriate or even harmful to another person. So be sure to consult with your primary care practitioner. If stress is contributing to your risk and increasing your unhealthy behaviors, a psychologist can help you recognize and understand your stress triggers, and develop action plans for dealing with them.

Focus on changing one thing at a time. Instead of trying to change everything at once, pick one existing habit to replace with a healthier alternative such as eating to reduce stress or sitting for hours watching TV. Set a reasonable goal and work toward meeting it.

Take care of yourself. No matter how hectic life gets, take the time to relax. Make time for yourself at least two or three times a week. Even ten minutes a day of “personal time” can help refresh your mental health outlook and slow down your body’s stress response system.

Have fun. Research shows that enjoying leisure activities can help your psychological and physical well-being. So, get involved in activities you enjoy, take a relaxing vacation or spend time with friends and family.

Ask for support. Accepting help and support from those who care about you can help alleviate stress and reduce your risk of heart disease. Build a support network from your friends and family. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by the challenge of managing the behaviors associated with heart disease you may want to talk with a psychologist.

“Maintaining a healthy heart is an ongoing process,” Monnier said, “and it is important not to become overwhelmed. Take small steps to manage your stress in healthy ways and don’t be afraid to ask for help from your family, friends or a trained mental health professional, such as a psychologist, when you need it.”

To learn more about heart disease and mind/body health, visit the American Psychological Association at www.apa.org/helpcenter and follow @APAHelpCenter on Twitter. To find out more about the South Carolina Psychological Association, visit www.scpyschology.com and follow us on Twitter at @SCPyschological.

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South Carolina Psychological Association is the only professional organization in South Carolina representing all areas of psychology: academic, practitioner, public service, and students. As a 501 (c)(6) professional association that represents the professionals of psychology in South Carolina, South Carolina Psychological Association has the purpose to advance psychology as a science, as a profession, and as a means of promoting human welfare; to foster and maintain high standards of practice, teaching, and research in the field of psychology; and to make available to the public information regarding psychology as a science and as a profession.

The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. APA's membership includes more than 134,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives.