

Happy Heart, Healthy Heart

February is the season of celebrating love. Fittingly enough, February is also American Heart Month. Scientists have known for a long time that negative emotions such as stress, anger, hostility, and grief are poisonous to your heart. These emotions trigger the release of the stress hormone, Cortisol, as well as chemicals in your body that raise blood pressure and heart rate. Buildup of these chemicals can increase your risk of a heart attack, heart disease and other health problems.

Newer research is starting to understand that just the opposite may be true as well. Your thoughts, attitudes and emotions go a long way to improve your overall health; research is finding that positive feelings about yourself and your future not only make you healthier and happier in general, but may also decrease the risk of heart disease.

There are many ways to develop optimism and reduce stress. Below are five quick ideas to increase the positivity in your own life:

- **Keep a gratitude journal:**

Try to end each day by spending a few minutes reflecting on the things in your life that you are thankful for. Write down what went well for you today, what you are looking forward to, and what you are grateful for.

- **Forgive and forget:**

It has been said that holding on to anger towards another is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. Anger hurts us more than the person it is directed at. Learn to let go of past grievances.

- **Develop a strong support network:**

Cultivate strong relationships with and seek comfort from people who genuinely care about you and your wellbeing. Just like the Beatles say, "we get by with a little help from our friends."

- **Avoid comparisons:**

When we compare ourselves to others, it is often because we are assuming they are happier, better, wealthier, or more successful than ourselves. The truth is we only know what we see from the outside. Realize that everyone is different, and find a way to be comfortable by just being you.

- **Quit the worry habit:**

Worrying is a waste of time and emotions. Instead, focus your energies on more practical ways to deal with your stressors.

