Coronary Artery Disease and Stress: Finding Your Inner Strength

Stress can weigh heavy on your heart.

Just the idea of having heart disease may be stressful. And right now, you might be struggling with all the changes in your life that came with the diagnosis. How your family deals with these changes also can add stress.

There's a lot you have to do to manage your heart disease. But it may help to remember that the good things you're doing—like taking medicines, eating better, and getting active—are making your heart stronger and helping you to feel better.

Thinking about inner strength

Do you know people who—no matter what's going on in their lives—stay positive and hopeful? They call on an inner strength that helps keep them going.

You can do this too. Building inner strength is like building muscle—exercising it makes it stronger. And it really can help you handle stress and manage your heart disease.

Building your inner strength

You know how to be stronger than you probably feel right now. So think back to a time before you were diagnosed. You probably had a tough time or two. What got you through it?

If it's hard to remember that time or how it felt, that's okay. You can always ask someone who knows you well to remind you how strong you can be.

You can try some of the things people with inner strength often practice. They:

- **Expect things to work out.** People with inner strength know they can't change what happens, but they've learned to change how they feel about it. A diagnosis of heart disease may not be easy to accept. But you might find things you can do to feel more in control, and that can relieve stress.

- **See the big picture.** People with inner strength try to look for the positive in stressful situations, and they learn from the situations. For example, you might look back and remember how nervous you were when you first joined your exercise group. And you might think about how after that first class, everyone congratulated you. Now the class has become a great place for support.

- **Try to be thankful for the good they see in their daily lives.** Keeping a gratitude journal can help you change your focus from what's wrong to what's right in your life.

- **Relax their bodies using techniques like deep breathing and guided imagery.** When you take time for yourself, it can help you feel recharged and stronger.
So do any of these ideas sound like something you might try? You might try one or two for a few days and see what works for you. If you need help, a counselor or therapist can also help you find ways to reduce stress.

**Planning for your inner strength**

If you’d like, you can use the space below to write about what you could do to help yourself feel stronger.

**What are some things that I could do to help me feel stronger?**