

Reduce Heart Stress This Holiday Season

Stress from family obligations, cold weather activities and more can increase one's risk of having a heart attack.

December 15, 2023 By Laura Schmidt

[Higher levels of stress](#) over time are linked to a higher risk of [cardiovascular disease](#). The holiday season may add to this risk. Indeed, 30% to 40% of heart attacks occur between Christmas and New Year's Day, according to an article in [U.S. News & World Report](#).

Stress can negatively impact [heart health](#) and give rise to increased [blood pressure](#), heart rate and inflammation, which may advance to [chronic diseases](#), according to [the American Heart Association](#). [Studies have shown](#) that Latinos have an increased risk of having a heart attack because they have high rates of obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes, all of which are known risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

"During the holiday season, there are different stresses like dealing with your in-laws and travel arrangements that may add stress," said cardiologist Donald Lloyd-Jones, MD, ScM, chair of the department of preventive medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, in the article.

Cold air and increased physical activity may also put one's heart at risk.

"Pursuing cold-weather activities, like shoveling, may be especially hazardous because we might overdo it, plus we're wearing extra layers, which could cause us to overheat," Lloyd-Jones said. "It's a perfect storm to maximize stress on the heart."

The holiday season also tends to disrupt sleep, diet and exercise routines.

"We're often knocked off our eating and sleeping patterns, we tend to consume more alcohol, we're not pursuing our typical physical activity and we may get thrown off our medication schedule."

Experts emphasize the importance of recognizing heart attack or stroke symptoms. Typical heart attack symptoms in men include heavy pressure in the middle of the chest and/or sudden

shortness of breath. Women can also experience these symptoms as well as fatigue, occasional dizziness or lightheadedness. Stroke symptoms include facial drooping, arm or leg weakness on one side and speech difficulty.

To read more, click [#Stress](#) or [#Heart Attack](#). There, you'll find headlines such as "[Long-Lasting Stress Increases Risk of Heart Disease](#)," "[11 Ways to Reduce Stress](#)" and "[Super Simple Ways to Defuse Stress](#)."

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