

Managing Stress and Staying Positive with Heart Disease



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Objectives

- Discuss challenges of living with Adult Congenital Heart Disease (ACHD)
- Identify symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Define stress and discuss the physical, emotional and behavioral consequences of stress
- Discuss ways to reduce stress and promote positive emotions

Issues to Consider

- How does congenital heart disease affect every day adult life?
- How does my condition impact my family?
- What are protective factors for adjustment?
- What resources are available in the area?

Common Challenges with ACHD

- Emotional
- Physical
- Cognitive
- “Adult Life”
 - Impact on Family
 - Childbearing
 - Raising your own family



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Protective Factors

- Feeling of Belonging
- Family Support
- Coping Style
- Locus of Control

Depression

- Loss of interest in everyday activities
- Feeling sad or down
- Difficulty focusing
- Difficulty sleeping
- Change in appetite
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Feeling worthless
- Suicidal thoughts
- Difficulty sleeping
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Loss of interest in sex

Anxiety

- Excessive worry
- Ominous feeling
- Avoiding situations /people
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Muscle tension
- Heart racing
- Episodes of excessive sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Stomachache
- Headache
- Difficulty sleeping

What is trauma

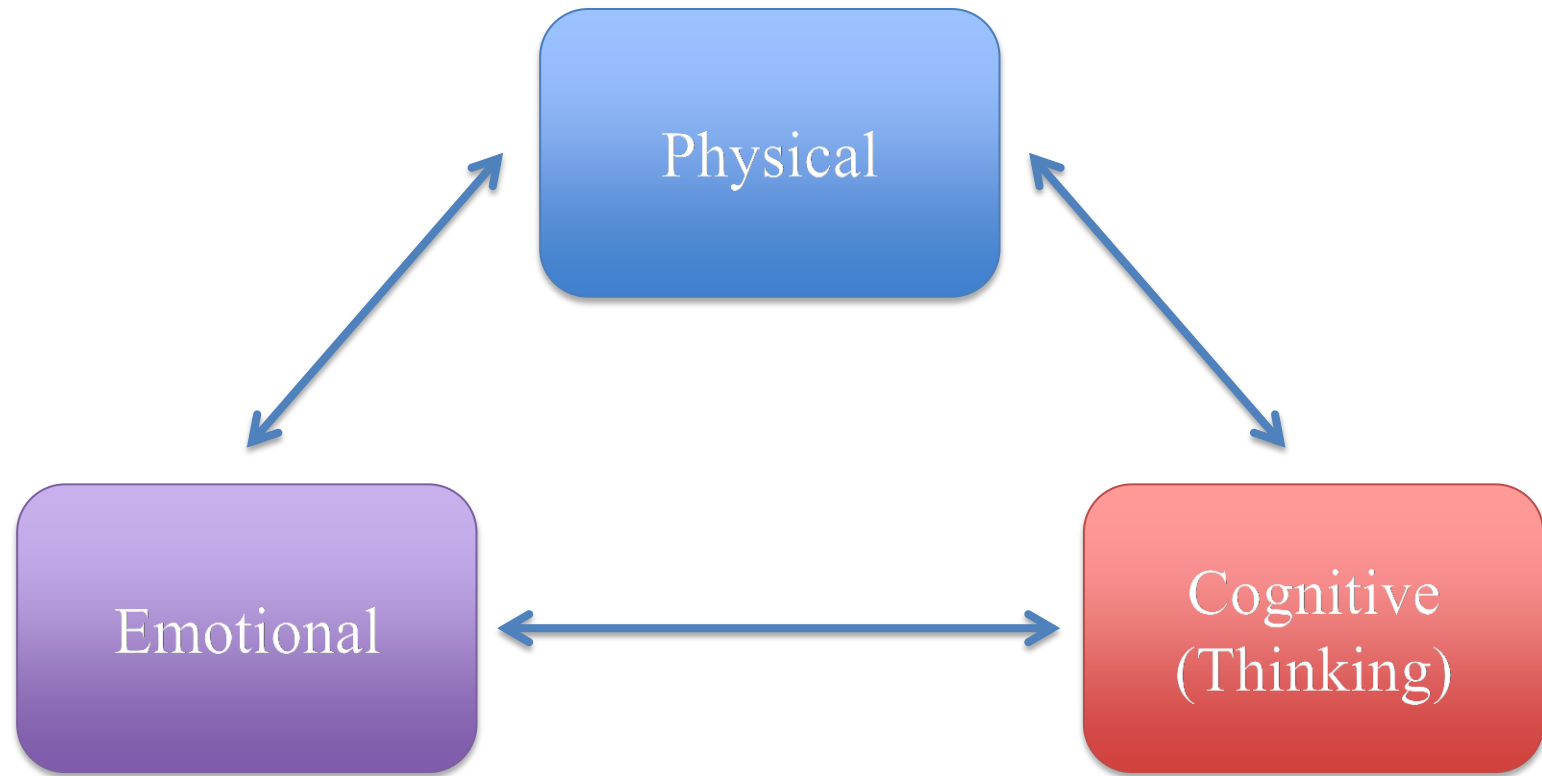
- Psychological and physiological response to:
 - Event/serious injury
 - Medical diagnosis, procedure or treatment
 - Pain
- Subjective experience vs. objective severity
- Can be adaptive vs. disruptive
- Acute Stress Response vs. PTSD

What is stress?

- **STRESS** refers to a feeling that is created whenever we react to particular events or things happening
- Physical
 - Poor sleep
 - Dehydration
 - Low blood sugar
- Emotional
 - Environmental
 - Relationship/work problems
 - Being stuck in traffic
 - Internal
 - Self-critical
 - Negative attitude
 - Perfectionistic/unrealistic expectations



Cognitive-behavioral Model of Stress



Physical Impact of Stress

- How does stress affect your body?
 - Common symptoms: headache, stomach ache, tight muscles, feeling shaky, heart palpitations, and chest pain
- Among cardiac patients:
 - Can trigger arrhythmias and make angina (chest pain) worse



Physical Impact of Stress

- What happens in the body?
 - Stress hormones are released (cortisol, adrenaline)
 - Constricts blood vessels, increases heart rate, contributes to high blood pressure
 - Increases inflammation in the body
 - May contribute to atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries)
 - Immune system suppression
 - More likely to develop an infection or catch a virus

Emotional Impact of Stress

- How do you typically respond to stress emotionally?
 - Also varies by person, but can include:
 - Irritable/agitated
 - Tearful/sad
 - “On edge”
 - Overwhelmed



Cognitive Impact of Stress

- Stress can also affect the way we think (cognitive)
 - How does stress influence your thoughts?
 - Worrying
 - Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
 - Forgetful
 - Thought Distortions
 - Catastrophizing
 - Filtering
 - Mind-reading
 - All or nothing



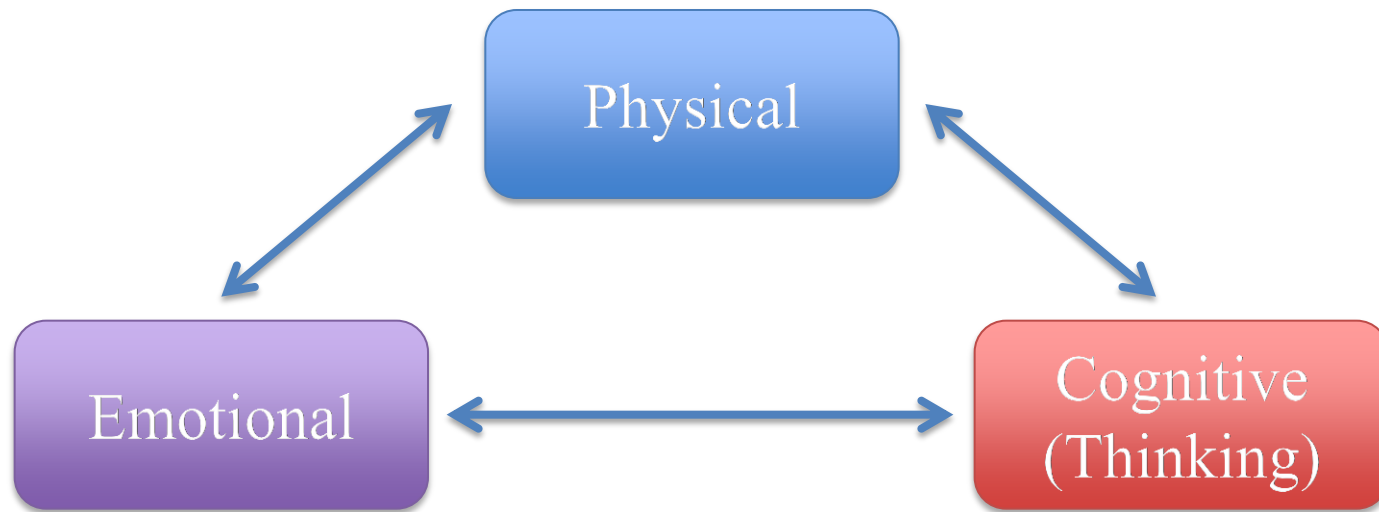
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Behavioral Outcomes of Stress

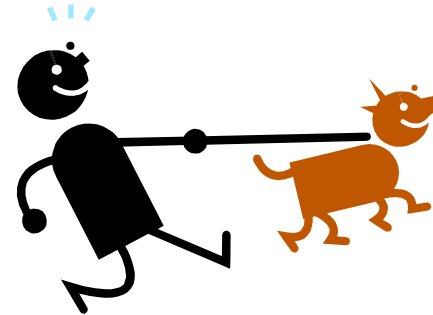
- Do your behaviors change when you experience stress?
 - Makes our bad habits worse
 - E.g., eat more unhealthy foods, exercise less
 - Not taking care of ourselves
 - Not taking medication or not going to doctors appointments
 - Disruptions in sleep
 - Overreacting to unexpected problems
 - Isolating or withdrawing from others

How Do We Combat Stress?



Physical Ways to Manage Stress

- Stay active!
 - Maintain your regular exercise routine
- OR
- Find ways to increase activity level (talk to your doc)
 - Short walks
- Why does it help?
 - Good for cardiac health
 - Helps regulate sleep
 - Improves mood
- Tips for getting starting/staying motivated
 - Make it enjoyable and social
 - Build exercise into your lifestyle
 - Set specific, attainable goals
 - Keep going!



Physical Ways to Manage Stress

- Sleep
 - Make it a priority!
 - 7-9 hours per night
- Consequences of poor sleep
 - Daytime fatigue
 - Mood disturbances
 - Cognitive impairments
 - Health problems



Physical ways to Manage Stress

- Positive sleep practices to improve sleep
 - Consistent sleep schedule
 - Avoid naps
 - Avoid stimulants and stimulating activities at bedtime (including electronics!)
 - Calming bedtime routine
 - Comfortable sleep environment
 - Use your bed only for sleeping



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Physical Ways to Manage Stress

- Relaxation
 - Always on the go, even when fun, can increase tension
 - What does relaxation feel like? How do you know when you are relaxed?
 - Relaxation techniques
 - Diaphragmatic (belly) breathing
 - Visual imagery

Deep Breathing

1. Breathe in through the nose
 - Try to expand your lower belly out, not your upper chest
2. Breathe out through your mouth
 - Purse your lips like you are blowing out a candle
3. Repeat multiple times



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Meditation: Visual Imagery

- Meditation is not just thinking about nothing...
- Meditation: focusing the attention of your mind
- Visual imagery is focusing your attention on an imagined tranquil place that engages your 5 senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste)



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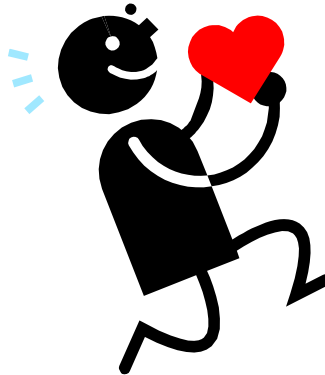


Beach Scene

- Get in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and imagine being on a beach at dusk
- Take yourself through a scenario where you are walking on the beach and experiencing the following possible sensations:
 - Warm colors of the setting sun off the water
 - Sound of the waves lapping onto shore
 - Smell of burning wood nearby from a bonfire
 - Cool breeze on your face
 - Taste a hint of saltwater in the air

Benefits of Relaxation

- Sends signals to your brain to lower heart rate and blood pressure
- Reduces tension in the body
- Something you can do anywhere, anytime!



Cognitive Ways to Manage Stress

- Be aware of negative/unrealistic self-talk
 - When under stress, negative thoughts can pop up which can impact our mood

| Negative | Positive |
|-----------------------------|--|
| “I can’t do this” | “I’ll do the best I can” |
| “It’s too complicated” | “I’ll tackle it from a different angle” |
| “Everything is going wrong” | “I can handle things if I take one step at a time” |

Cognitive Ways to Manage Stress

- Thought stopping: Saying “Stop!” to yourself when noticing negative thoughts
- Examine the evidence for and against negative thoughts
- Increase positive/realistic self-talk (goal is to be realistic about our experiences)

“Things could be worse”

“I can handle this”

“I can stay calm”

“I’m human and we all make mistakes.”

“I won’t let this problem get me down.”

- Be mindful of the positive – live in the moment

Emotional Ways to Manage Stress

- Do enjoyable things
 - Sounds simple, yet we often don't give ourselves time to do these
 - Spend some time doing your hobbies
 - Schedule in extra time for you
 - Extra-long hot bath, reading before bedtime, taking the dog for a walk
- Communicating
 - Talking with good friends/spouses about frustrations
 - Journaling
- Negative emotions, like all guests, should be greeted
 - Welcome it in (acknowledge it)
 - Then invite it to leave when you are ready



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Treatment Options

- Individual psychotherapy
- Group therapy
- Psychotropic medication
- Combination: Therapy and Medication
- Support groups



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Resources

Websites

www.heart.org

www.mendedhearts.org

www.familyatheart.org

mentalhealth.ohio.gov

Thank you!

