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SUCCESSFUL PREVENTION

## QUESTION & ANSWER

### Q&A

**Rich asks:** *Stress is increasing with the recession and the economic struggle. What is the best method to cope with anxiety to reduce the risk of a heart attack?*

Some amount of stress is beneficial and may be channeled into activity, which may mitigate the conditions leading to stress. Nevertheless, when stress becomes excessive and the individual becomes overwhelmed it is time to discuss with one's primary care physician the advisability of seeking the help of a mental health professional— either a psychiatrist, psychologist, psychiatric social worker, or nurse practitioner who specializes in mental health issues. Psychiatrists and nurse practitioners may prescribe medication which can lessen stress. All these therapists may also give short-term supportive “talk therapy” which may help an individual “reframe” their perception of their condition and see it in a different and sometimes helpful alternative context. It should be emphasized that daily aerobic exercise, such as walking, has been shown to augment the benefit of both medication and talk therapy.

If stress is causing chest pains, shortness of breath or weakness especially related to exertion, the most appropriate first step is contacting one's primary care physician who can help sort out anxiety from physical symptoms and signs which may be indicative of an underlying heart condition. For those with known heart disease, in whom stress is causing such symptoms, an urgent call to their primary care physician or cardiologist is in order.

**Jonah asks:** *What is the best supplement to take for stress? Are there any natural foods that I can eat to help reduce my stressful life situation?*

Unfortunately there are no randomized clinical trials which support the use of a specific supplement for relief of stress. Likewise, there is no whole food which has been shown in clinical trials to decrease stress. A balanced diet emphasizing whole foods, vegetables, and fruits is recommended. An avoidance of caffeine and alcohol is also helpful.

**Regina asks:** *I have gained twenty pounds over the last four months by being inactive and unemployed. What can I do to get back in shape quickly? Do any of these diet programs really work while providing the proper nutrition?*

Diet programs must be carefully assessed for nutritional completeness before implemented. The help of one's primary care physician or a registered dietitian may be very helpful in this regard. Weight Watchers is a tried and true, medically sound way to lose weight— although it may take more time than those with expectations of rapid weight loss would prefer. Other more rapid weight loss methods generally should be done under the supervision of medical professionals including physicians versed in medical nutrition therapy and registered dietitians.