

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

By Bill Parrish

Division Office-Sylva

Think about the times in your life when you've felt stress: maybe while giving a presentation at work, worrying about your children, racing to meet a deadline or arguing with your spouse. Remember how your heart was pounding and you were breathing harder? People with heart failure need to avoid that kind of physical response to stress. Emotional stress and anxiety make the heart work harder, which can make symptoms worse. That's why patients and their caregivers should work together to keep stress under control.

Naturally, people with heart failure feel anxious about their diagnosis and what might happen to them or their families. And everyone has certain stress-causing "triggers" - things such as rush-hour traffic, a demanding boss, finances or family conflict. No one can control all of these challenges, but there are ways to cope with them better. Here are 12 good strategies for reducing stress. Use them if you have heart failure, or pass them along to a loved one who does.

- Talk with family, friends, clergy
- Take 15 to 20 minutes a day to sit quietly, breathe deeply and think of a peaceful scene.
- Learn to accept things you can't change. You don't have to solve all of life's problems.
- Count to 10 before answering or responding when you feel angry.
- Don't use smoking, drinking, overeating, drugs or caffeine to cope with stress.
- Exercise regularly. Do something you enjoy, like walking, swimming, jogging, golfing, walking a pet, tai chi or cycling. Check with your doctor to determine what activity level is right for you.
- Think ahead about what may upset you and try to avoid it. For example, spend less time with people who bother you. If you're still working or volunteering, cut back on your hours and adjust your schedule to avoid driving in rush-hour traffic.

- Look for the good in situations instead of the bad.
- Plan productive solutions to problems. For example, talk with your neighbor if the dog next door bothers you, and set clear limits on how much you'll do for family members.
- Learn to say no. Don't promise too much. Give yourself enough time to get things done.
- Join a support group ... maybe for people with heart disease, for women, for men, for retired persons, or some other group with which you identify.
- Seek out a mental health professional or counselor if you can't cope on your own. Helping people is their specialty. Ask your doctor, family or friends for recommendations. If they can't help, ask your spiritual leader or a hospital social worker for some names



### DE-STRESS in 3 Minutes or Less:

#### Minute 1: Stay Grounded

- Take a few deep breaths
- Remind yourself where you are
- Notice the physical feelings that you are experiencing.

#### Minute 2: Reality Check

- All or nothing thinking; When you treat yourself with respect, what others say won't matter nearly as much.
- Either-or thinking; No one does well all the time. Mistakes are a valuable way to learn!
- Taking care of other people's business; People need to learn from their own problems.
- You can not fix everything!

#### Minute 3: Putting Things in Perspective

- Am I trying to control something I can't?
- Will anything bad happen if I postpone this until I have more time to figure things out?
- Am I worrying about things that might not even happen?

By Donna Hodges