



COPING WITH A CARDIAC EVENT



Having a cardiac event is a major event for a person, and it can be difficult adjusting to life afterwards. We all cope differently and may experience a range of feelings including shock, denial, anger, grief and guilt. Adapting to a cardiac event is a natural process of adjustment that we need to experience. There are various things we can do to help ourselves cope.

It can be normal to experience sadness, vulnerability, anxiety, frustration and fatigue in the aftermath of a cardiac event. Self-care and being patient with yourself will help. Approximately a third of people may have difficulty coping and may experience symptoms of depression and anxiety. Some people may have had considerable stress before their cardiac event and this can add to their difficulty in bouncing back after this. If you feel that you cannot cope with the distress or anxiety you are experiencing, speak to your doctor. Ask about a referral for extra support to talk about your concerns with a health care provider or a psychologist, where available.

You may be referred for cardiac rehabilitation after such an event. In the Mater Hospital this is an 8 week programme (16 hours) where you participate in a monitored exercise programme. You will have access to relevant information regarding your health and wellbeing. Outcomes are improved for individuals who attend such programmes. Please ask your health care provider about access to such a programme.

Stress management groups may help with the recovery process. Please see the link attached for the stress control series that is run in the Mater Hospital throughout the year that is available to all patients. In Cardiac rehabilitation you can attend the stress group or mindfulness group that is run as part of the programme.

Try to have good self-care, diet and exercise as per cardiac rehabilitation guidelines or from recommended sources such as Irish Heart Foundation.

Have enough good quality sleep and relaxation as part of your daily routine. This is an important part of the recovery process.

Acknowledge if stress is a part of your life and trying to make changes to this will help too.

Challenge negative thoughts or unhelpful thoughts about your health or your future. This can help you to cope in the here and now if you find you are worrying excessively about having another heart attack.

Actively focus your attention on something you enjoy if you find you are focusing on your worry.

After the sudden shock of a heart attack we can feel overly focused on how unlucky we were. As we become highly aware of our mortality it can help to refocus our awareness on the fact that we have survived and can alter our lives for the better. The aftermath of a heart attack can be a good time to reflect and make such changes. Our lives are precious and short. Sometimes when we realise this we can make good choices about how we spend our time and energy in the best way we can. While it is not good to make any sudden or drastic changes when we are in shock, we can spend time reflecting on how we might like to live a better quality life.

Use some of the many self-help resources available

and you can find some links on this website for this.

- ▶ www.irishheart.ie
- ▶ www.iacronline.ie
- ▶ www.mindfulness.ie
- ▶ www.franticworld.co
- ▶ www.stresscontrol.org



It is important that you are referred to Cardiac Rehabilitation after such an event. CR is a programme of monitored exercise classes and information sessions. Specific measurements and guidance will be given for core factors including smoking, blood pressure, lipids, diet and medicines. You will have access to relevant information and all of the team regarding your health and wellbeing. Outcomes are significantly improved for individuals who attend CR. Please ask your health care provider about referral to your nearest CR programme.



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