

## Stress/Anxiety & Coronary Heart Disease Research Findings

### 1) *Stress/anxiety is pervasive problem.*

- Research reports have noted that anxiety was the most common problem family practice doctors saw – 20-30% of patients in these settings have elevated levels of anxiety -- probably more if you consider broad construct of stress.
- Medical patients with anxiety problems take longer to recuperate.
- Patients and physicians often (more than half of the time for physicians in one study) do not recognize significant anxiety problems.

### 2) *Stress/anxiety is particularly a problem for those w/ coronary heart disease (CHD).*

- Research shows that recurring activation of the physiological responses that accompany a stress reaction predict the development of CHD (i.e., atherosclerosis).
- Anxiety/Stress is the most common immediate emotional response to acute MI.  
e.g.:
  - 55% of first time myocardial infarction (MI) survivors has significant anxiety/stress.
  - 2/3's of acute MI patients showed above normal anxiety levels & 26% had anxiety level equivalent to those observed in psychiatric inpatients.
- The stress response has damaging effects on those who have experienced a MI.
- Patients w/ high post-MI anxiety levels were 4.9x more likely to have in-hospital MI complications than those who were less anxious.
- Anti-anxiety medications can have complications when treating these stress/anxiety symptoms with CHD patients.

### 3) *Stress-prone personality characteristics linked to CHD.*

- Strong link between Type A personality type, particularly unhealthy anger reactions, & CHD.
- In one study, work demands, considered by themselves, cannot be linked to CHD, but when coupled with a perceived lack of control have been shown to predict CHD.

### 4) *Recognition & healthy adaptation to stress is important.*

- People's self-report of anxiety **not** shown to be causally related to CHD. Evidence indicates that the recognition of anxiety/stress can serve as an adaptive functioning for preventing CHD, by enabling a person to cope effectively with anxiety/stress feelings.
- Problems arise when people are stressed and don't recognize this,
  - **OR** recognize their stress/anxiety but don't use adaptive coping responses.

*Reference source:* Mostofsky, D. I., & Barlow, D. H. (Eds.) (2000). The management of stress and anxiety in medical disorders. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

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