

Caring for someone with a heart problem

The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA dedicates the month of September to raising awareness about cardiovascular disease. We would also like to give recognition and offer support to all devoted caregivers. Being diagnosed with a heart problem or being the carer of someone with some form of heart disease should not be daunting. Here are a few tips to provide you with some reassurance.

Find out more about the heart condition

There are many different heart conditions...your partner may have had a heart attack or suffer from angina. Some people may have conditions linked to coronary artery disease, for example high blood pressure, diabetes or heart failure. Whatever the case may be - find out as much as you can from the doctor or cardiologist. The more information you have, the easier it will be for you to help. Learn about the tests or procedures that need to be done so that you know what to expect.

Deal with stress

Caring for someone with a heart condition can be physically exhausting and emotionally draining. You may be anxious about what will happen in the future and you may feel that the extra pressure is putting a strain on your home and/or work life. This could eventually lead to feelings of frustration, helplessness, depression and being burnt-out. Learn to recognise the symptoms of stress and determine the main cause of the stress so that you can do something about it. Try not to let your loved one's illness take centre stage all the time. Enlist the help of family and friends to share the workload. Also take good care of yourself by eating healthily, doing regular physical activity and taking time out for relaxation. Talking to a close friend or family member could also be helpful.

Help reduce the risk of further heart problems

Most of the risk factors for heart disease are related to poor lifestyle choices which can be controlled by focussing on healthier lifestyle habits. To avoid future heart problems, encourage your loved one to make some changes – such as eating a healthy diet, reducing the amount of alcohol consumed, not smoking and being physically active. Contact the Heart Mark Diet Line on 0860 223 222 for more heart-healthy tips.

Know what to do if someone has a heart attack or cardiac arrest

Learn about the signs of a heart attack so that you know what to do in an emergency.

In the case of a heart attack:

- Get help immediately
- Get the person to sit in a comfortable position
- Phone 10177 (or 112 from a cell phone) for an ambulance and phone the doctor

If the person is unconscious:

- To find out if the person is conscious, gently shake him/her and loudly call out “are you all right?”
- If there is no response – call for help
- Administer CPR

Support groups

Support groups may be very helpful for people with a heart condition, as well as for their caregivers and family members. Meeting people who are struggling with similar challenges and sharing ideas or stories can provide encouragement. The Heart and Stroke Foundation SA

organises Mended Hearts support group meetings. These support groups are active in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. For more information about meetings, guest speakers and other support services contact Michelle Kearney on Tel 021 447 4222, email michelle@heartfoundation.co.za or visit www.heartfoundation.co.za. Cardiac rehabilitation services may also be available in the community via hospitals or nursing homes.

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