

Session 10: Cardiac Mental Health

"I didn't think it would ever happen to me!"

"I knew I should've taken better care of myself when I was younger - it's my fault that I had a heart attack"

"I was so scared of dying after my heart attack!"

"It didn't just happen to me, I feel fine, I'm not really that sick".

"Why is this happening to me? I'm too busy to deal with this - I'm too young! Life is so unfair!"

Common Feelings

SHOCK & FEAR

DENIAL

GUILT

ANGER

SADNESS

ACCEPTANCE

Mental Health Services Available in Sioux Lookout and Surrounding Areas

Name	Contact information	Location	Referral?
SLMHC MHAP (Mental Health & Addictions Program)	737-1275	Sioux Lookout	Self-Referral Patient can call
SLFNA (Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority) Nodin Child & Family Intervention Services	737-4011 or 1-800-446-7863	Sioux Lookout	Self-Referral Patient can call First Nations clients focused
Crisis Response Line	1-866-888-8988	Dryden	24 / 7 phone service Patient can call
Older Adults Program	737-4996 223-8816	Sioux Lookout Dryden	For Ages 65+, need referral from doctor

Common Emotions, Associated Symptoms, and Helpful Tips after a Cardiac Event

It's common to have mental, emotional, and financial stress after a cardiac event, and it's completely normal to experience these emotions. Having a support system will be important! **Highlight the feelings/emotions or symptoms below if you've experienced them** – try some of the tips to help with coping. Monitor which tips are helpful for you!

Always know that there is support there for you!

Emotion	Symptoms / Self Talk	Helpful Tips
Shock & Fear	I can't believe it happened to me	Take one step at a time
	I'm scared it will happen again	Your main priority is your health
	I'm worried about the future	Talk to someone, ask questions
	Shock and fear can elevate blood pressure and heart rate, making your heart work harder!	Wait before making big life decisions!
Denial	I'm going to stop taking my meds, I feel fine!	What frightens you?
	I'm not going to go to my doctor's appointment, what a waste of time!	Talk about your fears and emotions with someone you trust
	Denial can be harmful if it lasts for a while, because it can keep you from taking care of yourself.	Make a list of what could happen (both good and bad) if you don't follow your doctor's advice
	Denial means acting like your heart disease didn't happen or it doesn't matter.	Take your medications properly Understand that you're in charge of your health! This will help you cope and feel more in control
Guilt	It's my fault I had a heart attack, I should've taken better care of myself	Guilt can make you feel powerless, hopeless and depressed.
	You say "If only" statements, like "If only I took better care of myself when I was younger"	Some causes of heart disease are beyond your control, like family history Focus on what you can do now to take care of your health and become more control of your life

Emotion	Symptoms / Self Talk	Helpful Tips
Anger	I feel like it's so unfair!	Recognize that you're angry and talk about it. Don't blame yourself or others.
	I feel like I'm losing control and want to fight back	Let people know how you feel. Be honest
	I feel like I'm being punished	Don't hold these negative feelings in. Talk about them when they happen. You may explode later if you hold them in
	I don't think anyone understands how I feel	Learn how to deal with anger without harming your health or relationships.
Sadness	I'm angry at my friends and family	
	I've lost my good health, I'm sad that it happened	Talk about your feelings with someone you trust
	I'm sad or overwhelmed with the lifestyle changes I need to make to take care of my heart	Know that you're a valuable person with positive attributes, like strength and knowledge Let yourself cry if you need to
	I fear not being able to make lifestyle changes	If you feel sad, going for a walk for 10 minutes can help increase your "feel good" hormones, called endorphins
Acceptance	I cry easily and don't take pleasure in things I used to enjoy	Ask your health care provider about seeing a social worker or counsellor if your feelings worry you.
	I'm feeling less angry, guilty, and sad	Ask your health care providers questions and take genuine interest in their answers!
	I feel like I can get back to my life and do the things I enjoy	Feel good about the healthy lifestyle choices you're making
	I see the future positively	
<p>When to ask for professional help: (Asking for help is not a sign of weakness – it's a sign of courage!)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have trouble following what your healthcare team has recommended for you (e.g., taking medications as prescribed) • If you fear end of life, which is making it hard to do day to day things • If you feel depressed, anxious, increase stress most days, or aren't sleeping well most nights • If you're having trouble controlling your anger or are having outbursts • Or if you just feel the need to talk to someone other than someone you know! 		

Stress

Stress is a part of our everyday lives as we respond to positive and negative events and situations. Stress is different for everyone! What is stressful for you may be fun for someone else! Learning to live with stress means getting to know yourself, what makes you stressed, what makes you tense, and what works for you to reduce the tension and stress.

Here are some general stress reduction suggestions. Feel free to try these to see if they work for you!

- Do one thing at a time. Divide your workload into smaller tasks and enjoy feeling accomplished.
- Learn how to say “no.” Many people who have had heart attacks are “yes” people who find their lives are busy and crowded with someone else’s obligations and commitments.
- Try to talk through a concern or issue. Try not to bottle up your feelings
- Identify the situations and people that trigger your stress and try to limit your exposure to them, when possible. Walk away or deal with the difficulty when you feel more composed.
- Spend time enjoying the company of people who make you feel good or doing an activity that you enjoy.
- Learn relaxation techniques, and use the ones that work best for you. Try relaxation techniques at least once a day. See Appendix D: Progressive Muscle Relaxation for deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation techniques you can try.
- Identify support networks and use them.
- Keep a Stress Awareness Journal for two weeks to help you identify stressors in your day-to-day life. Here are some example entries, with the blank journaling section on the next page.
- Feel free to make copies of the Stress Awareness Journal for future use!

Stress Awareness Journal Sample Entries

Date/Time	Stressful Event	Symptoms	Coping Techniques
Monday, 7:50AM	Alarm didn't go off, rushing, late for work	Agitated, angry, increased heart rate	Took deep breath, called boss to let them know I'm running late - no concerns
Wednesday, 4:00PM	Busy day at work, have to pick up kids from school, stressed about preparing supper	Increased heart rate, headache, irritable with kids, frustrated	Took deep breath, called family member to help with supper tonight
Saturday, 1:00PM	Family coming to visit on short notice	Panic, frustration, annoyance, irritation	Took deep breath, had time for a brisk 10 minute walk to de- stress before planning for the family visit

Stress Awareness Journal			
Date/Time	Stressful Event	Symptoms	Coping Technique
<p>After two weeks, review your journal entries. Try to define your main stressor or triggers of stress. How have you reacted to these stressors (emotionally, physically)? Is there a way you could cope better with the situation? Choose healthy alternatives. Did the coping techniques you tried work?</p>			

If you only have a couple minutes, here is a quick muscle relaxation sequence you can do anywhere. Review Appendix F: Progressive Muscle Relaxation for more information on muscle relaxation.



Session 10: What Have I Learned So Far?

1. What are three common feelings associated with having a cardiac event?

2. What are three common questions people ask after having a cardiac event?

3. What are three common tips to help cope with having a cardiac event?

4. When should you talk to a mental health professional?

5. What are services in your area that you can access?

Mental Health Resources

Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada
<http://www.heartandstroke.ca/heart/recovery-and-support>