

LEARN TO LIVE BULLETIN

Your guide in wellness & mental health

The Mind-Heart Connection

The dreaded phone call from the ER—a loved one has had a heart attack. We all want to avoid that call and reduce the risk of cardiac crisis. But did you know that mental health and heart health are deeply intertwined? Studies show psychological factors like stress, anxiety, anger, and depression can increase risks for high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, and other cardiovascular issues. Meanwhile, experiencing a cardiovascular event like a heart attack can trigger conditions like anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Understanding this mind-heart connection is key to being proactive and taking steps to keep both our mental and physical health in check.



So how exactly are our heart health and mental health linked? While researchers are still investigating all the links, some ways they can impact one another include:

- Stress can trigger the release of hormones, like cortisol, which can cause damage and inflammation in blood vessels over time.
- Depression and anxiety can make it harder to maintain heart-healthy lifestyle habits.
- Cardiac diagnoses or procedures can lead to heightened worry, anxiety, and/or depression.

Managing Mental Health for Better Heart Health with Learn to Live

There are many accessible, evidence-based tools within our Learn to Live programs that you can start putting into practice to improve mental health factors connected to heart health risks. Within our Resilience program, we have tools to focus on gratitude, hope, optimism, and building stronger relationships. Gratitude alone can help to lower blood pressure and inflammation, and it increases our chances of engaging in heart-healthy habits, like sleeping well and getting regular exercise. In addition, our Insomnia program can help produce the good night's sleep that has been shown to dramatically reduce the risk of heart failure.

If you're someone who has experienced a recent cardiovascular event, it's not uncommon to feel worried, stressed, anxious or even depressed. You may be wondering, "What if it happens again?" or maybe there is a deeper feeling of despair leading to depression. Both our Stress, Anxiety, & Worry and Depression programs teach powerful strategies that can help us manage emotions in tough moments. One tool that can be particularly helpful is Present Awareness - Learn to Live's version of mindfulness. With Present Awareness, we encourage you to become an objective observer of your thoughts, emotions, and sensations and let them come and go. Of course, these potent strategies can reduce both our stress and the medical risks that go with stress in the first place.

Did you know that Learn to Live offers a free 5-minute assessment so you can learn about your mental health? Even if you haven't shown signs of heightened stress, anxiety, or depression—a quick screening can give you an overview of your mental well-being. You'll get an immediate program recommendation and you can even email yourself the results.

Use this as an opportunity to proactively address your mental health and associated heart health risk factors. If you're concerned about your heart health, having a conversation with your doctor is an important place to start. To start addressing your mental health, you can take a quick mental health assessment by scanning or visiting learntolive.com/partners and enter access code **MMHG**. Learn to Live is available to you and your family members, ages 13 and older at no cost.

