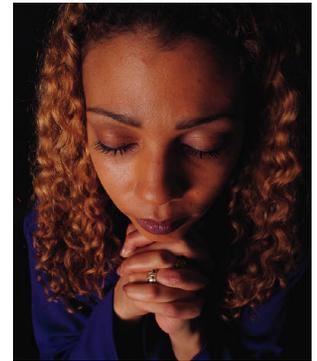


A Mindful Heart

February is Heart Month and there are many ways we can take care of our heart. One important way is through our emotional health. Everyone hears about the toll that stress can take on our bodies, but we usually do not pay much attention to it until we start to feel really awful. It is much more helpful to incorporate small things into our lives each day to avoid "hitting the wall".



Most of us move through our lives without giving much thought to how much our pace is impacting us. It is just something we have to do. Our jobs, family, friends and hobbies all clamor for our time. While much of it is good stress, sometimes we can get too much of a good thing. When you add negative stress into that; demanding or difficult jobs, challenges with spouses, children, parents or health issues, it quickly tips the scale and what felt like a comfortable pace now feels overwhelming. There are ways to help yourself cope better in the day to day, which can help you be more resilient and able to manage when things get rough.

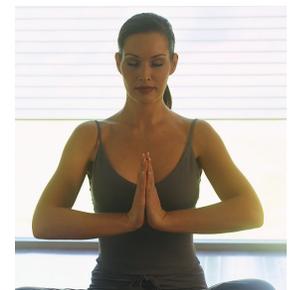
Below are suggestions to assist you in being mindful about the time and energy that you put out every day.

- **Take time to be thoughtful**

Most of us have many demands on our time. It is helpful to consider if the things you are doing are benefitting you in the way you hoped they would. We are good at filling our lives with many obligations. Consider each activity. Do you get something out of it? Is it nurturing you? Is it something you need to do? Is it a short term or long term obligation? Do you want to continue with this activity? Often our kids are involved in multiple activities. We are in a culture that believes that success is measured by how much we do. However, it can be challenging to manage all those things, for ourselves and our family. Help your children consider their activities. What is really important to them? What do they enjoy the most? What will impact long term goals they have? If you can assist your children in being balanced through the example you set with your life and helping them give thought to what is really important, it is a lesson that will assist them and you for the rest of your lives.

- **Take time for yourself**

It is easy to feel that taking time for ourselves is a waste of time with all that we have to do. The thing to remember and focus on though is that without this time to rejuvenate, we will not be nearly as good at accomplishing all those other things we want to do. Here are some suggestions for quiet time for you.



➤ **Read a book**

It can be an escape, a way to learn something new or just an opportunity to wind down. Take 10-20 minutes before bed and read that book you have wanted to read. If you are not engaged by a book, find a magazine or articles you would like to read and have them ready. It helps to not read on electronic devices before sleeping as they can be over stimulating.

➤ **Take a bath**

Warm water can be so restorative.

➤ **Write to a friend or family member or journal**

Do this the old fashioned way with pen and paper. This helps us to slow down, focus and have complete thoughts.

• **Take time for peace and quiet**

One of the greatest gifts you can give yourself is quiet time. There are many studies that show that mindfulness has a significant impact on our health and that the best way to achieve that is through meditation and/or prayer. Make a goal to start by having 10 minutes of quiet time each day. Consider the morning or evening and use it as time to ready yourself for the day or to decompress. Here are some suggestions for meditations:

➤ **"Guided Imagery"**

Sit or lay down. Imagine yourself in your favorite place in nature. If you love the beach, close your eyes and see the ocean, the sand, the blue sky and all that is around you. Try to smell the salt air. Feel the warmth of the sun. Hear the waves rolling in and the sound of the seagulls.

➤ **"Staying Focused"**

Sit or lay down. Begin counting your breaths. Count once for each time you breathe in and out. Your goal is to count to 50. Every time your mind wanders you need to start back at 1. (This is challenging and takes practice. You might want to start with trying to get to 10!)