



February 18, 2017 – Grand Rapids, MI

## How to Fix a Broken Heart

What causes broken heart syndrome (BHS)? Most types of cardiomyopathy are idiopathic—no one really knows how it happens. In the case of BHS, there's a severe stressor, good or bad, that precipitates the symptoms. But what is actually going on? I found two potential explanations.

First, an excess amount of catecholamines are released in response to the stress. The theory is that this stuns the heart muscle and temporarily causes the muscle weakness. The second theory involves an increase in sympathetic activity in the heart. In short, the nerves that stimulate the heart to beat faster keep firing. Between the two factors, the heart tissue gives the symptoms of BHS.

Another factor may be hormone levels; BHS mostly happens to post-menopausal women over 55 years old. More research is needed to find out whether this is truly a factor or not.

The most important thing to know is that the effects are temporary; the heart tissue is not permanently damaged and can recover. Here's the important point: the person still needs to be treated in a hospital. Left untreated, the person can die. Typical treatments may be medications to slow down the heart rate and reduce blood pressure. While there may be no blockages, all those tests may show excessive plaque, so changes in diet and medications may be warranted. Typically the heart can recover in a month or two with no permanent damage.



Can you prevent BHS? After all, not everyone who has a severe stress event gets BHS. It's hard to say with certainty, but there are three things that may help. First, have a strong heart to begin with; exercise is critical for that. Second, find a way to deal with stress on a regular basis: yoga, prayer, meditation, counseling, whatever works for you—do it. It can help with the stress response.

Finally, never, never, ever ignore chest pain. In this case, I'm talking to my women readers. I rant all the time about men who ignore chest pain. Don't be like them! Women take on the role of caregivers, and that's so important to our society, but this is a time when you have to take care of yourself first. When in doubt, check it out.

What are you prepared to do today?

**Dr. Chet**

---

**WGUV** FM 88.5/95.3 **npr** **Straight Talk on Health**

Hear Dr. Chet's take on the latest health news and research—listen to *Straight Talk on Health* Sunday at 7:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. in the Eastern Time Zone on WGUV-FM 88.5 or 95.3, or listen live via the Internet by going to [www.wgvu.org/wgvunews](http://www.wgvu.org/wgvunews) and clicking on "Listen Live" at the top.

---

The health information in this message is designed for educational purposes only. It's not a substitute for medical advice from your healthcare provider, and you should not use it to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease. It's designed to motivate you to work toward better health, and that includes seeing your healthcare professional regularly. If what you've read raises any questions or concerns about health problems or possible diseases, talk to your healthcare provider today.

Subscribe to the Message from Dr. Chet at [DrChet.com](http://DrChet.com) — © Chet Zelasko PhD LLC