

OUT OF
ORDER!

heart healthy

controlling stress key to good cardiovascular health

Women who report having high job strain have a 40 percent increased risk of cardiovascular disease, including heart attacks and the need for procedures to open blocked arteries, compared to those with low job strain, according to a recent study released by the American Heart Association.

In addition, job insecurity – fear of losing one’s job – was associated with risk factors for cardiovascular disease such as high blood pressure, increased cholesterol and excess body weight. However, it is not directly associated with heart attacks, stroke, invasive heart procedures or cardiovascular death, researchers said.

Job strain, a form of psychological stress, is defined as having a demanding job, but little to no decision-making authority or opportunities to use one’s creative or individual skills.

“Our study indicates that there are both immediate and long-term clinically documented cardiovascular health effects of job strain in women,” said Michelle A. Albert, M.D.,

M.P.H., the study’s senior author and associate physician at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts. “Your job can positively and negatively affect health, making it important to pay attention to the stresses of your job as part of your total health package.”

Doctors should ask about stress along with traditional heart risk factors like smoking and blood pressure, Albert said. “We need to start taking that seriously.”

She has these tips for workers:

- **Exercise.** It clears the mind, lifts the mood and curbs other heart risks, such as high blood pressure and cholesterol.
- **Limit bringing work home.**
- **Get a life.** Do things with friends, whether they’re folks you work with or not.
- **Build “me time” into every day.** “It can be as little as 10 or 15 minutes to meditate, pray or take a walk,” Albert said.