**R**esilience to stress can be your choice. We can look at stress as just minor annoyances we all encounter throughout the day, “That guy is driving erratically, I’ll be careful.”, or let them blow up into “You Cut Me Off, Why Are You Picking On Me, “I’ll get you for that, you bum!!!” moments. How you handle those moments, how resilient you are to letting other peoples’ rudeness or problems that come up at work negatively affect your own life, can have a huge impact on your health.

Researchers don’t all say that stress directly causes heart disease. Not enough data. But we can find agreement that stress is a debilitating factor that can contribute to heart disease by causing unhealthy behaviors as coping mechanisms. “Work is sooo boring” , grab a cigarette. “Those customers are driving me nuts”, stop after work for a few shots of liquid relaxation. “I’m exhausted”, plop on the couch with a big bag of chips. Obviously, not good coping mechanisms for stress.

A simple way to increase your resilience to stress is to refrain from internalizing negative occurrences in your life. In other words, don’t let it bother you. That guy in traffic didn’t single you out to cut off, he’s just a bad driver. With a crabby customer, just as one bad apple can spoil the whole barrel, one unreasonable customer can affect your whole day. Don’t let it. Do all you can to help them out, and give an extra smile to the next guy. How many days until retirement? Take a deep breath, let it out slowly. Think about your new grandchild, your next vacation. Say a prayer.

**E** nd the hold of smoking on your life. Smoking is a killer. Don’t just take it from me, the esteemed National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute states that “Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease.” ₁. And heart disease can kill you. So whatever effort it takes, no matter how many times you have tried before, try to quit again. Ask your doctor for advice. Talk to a friend who quit. Don’t let a heart attack be the reason you quit.

I trained quite a few smokers over the years. In the 1970’s, many of the business people I trained were smokers. I remember a guy who would get off the exercycle and go out in the lobby to light up. One of the other instructors joined him. It drove me nuts, but finally, I decided it would do smokers some good if they continued to exercise. Often over time, smokers would come to realize that exercise made them feel better. They enjoyed the comradery with the other guys and felt their bodies becoming stronger and firmer. I had to point out to them that they were actually smoking less. So don’t think you have to quit smoking first before you start an exercise or better nutrition program.

It’s not only cigarette smokers that experience an increase in the risk of heart disease. We know that second hand smoke contributes as well. People who work in restaurants and casinos where smoking is allowed can experience the health effects of smoking. ₂. If you live with a smoker, do whatever you can to convince them to quit. If not for themselves, then for you.

As that wonderful group, The Platters, sung “...When your heart’s on fire, you must realize, Smoke gets in your eyes.” But that’s it!

**V** egetables are natures’ medicine pills. Many people tell me that as adults, they actually like the vegetables they used to spurn as kids. All those times you rolled peas around the plate, trying to spread them out so it looked like you ate some. Trying to disguise the taste with gravies and sauces. I do know someone who poured delicious, chocolatey Bosco® on broccoli. Still tasted like broccoli.

Adding vegetables to your meals will help you lose Excess Body Fat. Oh, now you’re paying attention. I’ve found that for some people who have trouble eliminating certain foods from their diet, simply adding 3 to 4 cups of vegetables each day resulted in a reduction in the portions of cheesy pasta or supersized greasy burgers they ate. The vegetables with all that nice fiber made them feel fuller. So less heart clogging stuff, more heart healthy nutrient packed good stuff. Those same nutrients have been shown to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

I have a Tupperware® on my desk right now filled with broccoli, red peppers, carrots, green beans, and Chinese pea pods. No, I wasn’t up last night rinsing, slicing and dicing. I simply opened my freezer, took out a one pound bag that I picked up from the grocery store, veggies into a bowl, microwaved to thaw. Absolutely delicious. No added salt or sugar. And unfortunately, no Bosco®.

**E** xercise can greatly reduce your risk for heart disease. Wait a minute, Kev. Exercise? You just did “P” for the same thing. Let me explain. OK, exercise is physical activity and you can think of physical activity as exercise. But for our list of Tips to Prevent Heart Disease, keeping your body active and your blood pumping is hugely important. So you can think of the times you garden, walk a distance, or play basketball with your kids as heart healthy physical activity. But for many of us, especially those in the frozen North, physical activity can be tough to do year round. For those times, it’s wise to have an exercise program.

Your program should be considered after first touching base with your doctor. She can help you with cautions if you have cardiovascular disease, or other ailment. After your visit, take advantage of the resources available to you. Get the cobwebs off that exercycle and make it a healthy habit to do 10 minutes in the morning. Great way to get the blood pumping. It will clear your mind better than a glazed donut. Don’t increase your minutes until you consistently bike every other day for a two weeks. Then try 15 minutes. If you start to miss days, go back to 10 minutes until it’s as much a habit as brushing your teeth. On the other days of the week, pull out an old Disco Aerobics tape, pull on those old leg warmers that are probably in the bottom of your sock drawer, and go to town. There are over 36,000 health clubs in the U.S., so a good chance one is close to your home or work. Some people find it convenient to pop in before work. You can meet a lot of retired folks during the day. After work can get busy. The attraction of like-minded people and professional equipment can really be a welcome addition to your week.

It’s a wonderful fact of life that the same aerobic activities that burn Excess Body Fat, help prevent heart disease as well.

**N** ever, ever say or even think “I can’t do what I used to.” Unless you were once a professional basketball player, no, you can still have a great time shooting baskets.

Unless you were a scratch golfer, no, your swing, learned after many years of practice, is still there.

Unless you were an Olympic swimmer, no, the great Diana Nyad was the first person to swim from Cuba to the U.S. At age 64. 110 miles. No shark cage.

Unless you are Nanu Ram Jogi of Rajasthan, India, who fathered his 21st child at age 90. Well, you’re on your own there.

The fact is, you can enjoy many of the same things you always enjoyed. If you replace “I can’t do what I used to” with “Boy, I’d sure like to do that “. It’s the desire to try that will fill your calendar with interesting things to do. If you don’t try, each day is just a blank box with a big X thru it.

First, pencil in your physical activity. Write on Monday, walk for 15 minutes. Wednesday, 15 minutes. Friday, 15 minutes. Do your walking like it’s a prescription from your doctor. I’m sure he would agree. Then keep track of washing the car, yes, with a sponge and a hose. Gardening. Volunteer at church. Fifteen minutes with the weights. Next time I look at your refrigerator, I want to see all your calendar squares filled.

**T** ake time to get your numbers. Make regular appointments with your doctor. Go in, read the magazines. She will take your blood pressure, easy, and a blood sample to check your cholesterol. A tiny poke. Stop being a baby! You’ll get a sucker if you’re good. That tiny poke could save your life. Your doctor will explain the results. Blood Pressure of 120/80 is considered normal. HDL, High-Density Lipoproteins, the good stuff, plus LDL, Low-Density Lipoproteins, the bad stuff, and Triglycerides are good indicators of your risk for heart disease.

The American Heart Association has lots of great information at, where else, [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org).

₁. [https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/smo#](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/smo)

₂. <http://action.acscan.org/site/DocServer/EffectsSecondhand-Smoke.pdf?docID=5161>