



Tips for Caregivers of Heart Attack Survivors

Support Loved Ones

Who Have Survived a Heart Attack

A heart attack occurs when the blood supply to part of the heart muscle is severely reduced or stopped. This is caused by blockage of one of the coronary arteries that supplies blood to the heart muscle. A heart attack can be a life-altering event, not just for the survivor, but also for the family and friends of the survivor. If you are the caregiver of a heart attack survivor, your new role can be challenging. However, it is important to remember that your support, understanding and knowledge of the needs of the survivor may be critical to his or her recovery and overall well-being, ultimately helping him or her prevent another heart attack. Following are a few tips to help you provide **heartfelt support** to a loved one who has survived a heart attack.

Understand How to Care for a Heart Attack Survivor

After a heart attack, survivors may experience a variety of different emotions ranging from worry and fear to anger or depression. They may also be concerned about the risk of another heart attack. One of the best ways to care for a loved one after a heart attack is by following, and helping them to follow, their physician's recommendations for managing their condition and its potential emotional impact.

Prepare and Educate Yourself

Prepare yourself with information about heart attack prevention to help your loved one to recover and prevent another heart attack. Educate yourself through research and ask his or her healthcare team questions about preventing a future heart attack. Some key things to know include:

- **Exercise:** With a doctor's approval, an exercise routine can help increase energy, lower blood pressure and build muscle strength to make everyday tasks less tiring. Exercise can also help people feel more positive, confident and cope better with stress. Ask your loved one's physician how much and what type of exercise is right for him.
- **Diet:** Making healthy food choices is important and can help prevent a future heart attack. A heart-healthy diet should include several lifelong eating habits, such as limiting salt and saturated fat intake. Ask your loved one's physician about the type of dietary plan best suited to help his recovery.
- **Medicines:** Leading cardiologists recommend that heart attack survivors take beta-blockers, ACE inhibitors, aspirin and statins to help protect the heart and help prevent another heart attack. Ask your loved one's physician what medicines are right for him.

Provide Support and Encouragement for New Habits and Healthy Lifestyle Choices

Heart attack survivors may need to make lifestyle changes to protect their heart from a future heart attack and improve their overall quality of health. Some of these changes may include quitting smoking, losing weight, improving eating habits, exercising regularly, controlling blood pressure, controlling blood sugar if they have diabetes and taking medications exactly as prescribed. Provide support and encouragement for your loved one as some of these changes may be stressful and challenging. In fact, because these changes can ultimately be good for everyone, consider getting the entire family involved.

Organizations and Caregiver Support

A number of organizations provide information for caregivers of heart attack survivors, including organizations such as Mended Hearts (www.mendedhearts.org), a nationwide heart patient support group with a mission to inspire hope in heart disease patients and their families. Other organizations include the American Heart Association (www.americanheart.org) and Heartmates (www.heartmates.com), which provide information on how to live a heart-healthy life and prevent a future heart attack. They may also provide information on other local organization and support groups for caregivers. Look for these organizations online or ask a healthcare professional for more information. Additional groups to consider may include:

Family Caregiver Alliance
www.caregiver.org

National Alliance for Caregiving
www.caregiving.org

National Family Caregivers Association
www.nfca.org

Well Spouse
www.wellspouse.org

Children of Aging Parent
www.caps4caregivers.org

Resources and Additional Services to Consider

Caring for someone can be a rewarding experience, but it is understandable that it may sometimes be tiring and stressful. Throughout this experience, remember that it is important to care for yourself as well. There are many services that can help you care for yourself and your loved one. These services may include:

- **Community pharmacies that deliver medications**
- **Home health agencies**
- **Mental health agencies**
- **Support groups**
- **Meal delivery program**

Talk About it and Treat it!

One of the best things you can do is to communicate with your loved one and with his or her health care team. Also, keep in mind that if a member of your family has had a heart attack, you and other family members may be at higher risk. It's very important to make changes now to lower the risk of a future heart attack. With guidance from your doctor, the right treatment plan and a heart-healthy lifestyle, you and your loved one can prevent a future heart attack and live a fuller, longer life!