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### Dramatic Benefits of Stress Management

In January 2007, researchers published a study (in *Hypertension: Journal of the American Heart Association*), finding that offering stress management training to workers can reduce stress on the heart. Here are some of the highlights of that study:

- Office workers facing layoffs – a significant stress-inducer – were able to benefit from small, yet significant changes in heart rate variability and arterial blood pressure by participating in a stress management program at work.
- Following completion of a year-long stress management program, workers' test scores measuring perceived stress were considerably lower than baseline scores. In addition, workers reported that they felt less fatigue than they did before the stress management training.

In another study spanning five years (published in *American Journal of Cardiology*), which focused on men with heart disease who received four months of stress management training, the results showed:

- The men were less likely to need a heart procedure (bypass surgery) over the study period.
- Despite the added cost of stress management training, the men in this group (over 5 years) had lower hospitalization and physicians' costs than men in the standard care group.

In another study (published in the *American Journal of Cardiology*), researchers tracked 94 men with heart problems and ischemia (evidence of continuing insufficient flow of blood to the heart). Participants were split into three groups:

- A four-month aerobic exercise program.
- Weekly stress management classes for four months.
- A control group receiving standard cardiac care.

The stress management program emphasized the physiological effect of stress on cardiovascular disease and gave training in muscle relaxation. It also taught participants to recognize how they created stress through cognitive distortions (like mistakenly blaming themselves for bad luck).

Researchers followed the patients for five years, recording any cardiac events (heart attacks, angioplasty and bypass surgery). They also calculated expenses from federal government averages for each procedure. The results were:

- The stress management group had an average of 0.8 additional cardiac events with total medical care costs of \$9,251.
- The usual care group had 1.3 additional cardiac events with total medical care costs of \$14,997.
- The aerobic exercise group also experienced more cardiac events and higher average costs per member than the stress management group. However when the results were adjusted for age and cardiac history, the differences were not statistically significant.

An additional study at Duke University (published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*), found that patients with coronary vessel disease and ischemia who learned stress management lowered their risk of subsequent cardiac events by over 70% (through learning how to manage stress).

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**Sources: Stress Management at the Worksite Reversal of Symptoms Profile and Cardiovascular Dysregulation** *Hypertension* 2007;49:291 **Stress Management in Work**

**Settings: a critical review of the health effects** *American Journal of Health Promotion* 1996 Nov-Dec;11(2):112-35 **Seventh Report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure** *Hypertension* 2003;42:1206 **Counter-Stress Effects of Relaxation on Proinflammatory and Anti-Inflammatory Cytokines** *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity* 2008 Jun 27