

## Psychology Helps After a Heart Attack

For many who have suffered a heart attack, the key to recovery is paying attention to the relationship between the body and the mind.

Psychologists have conducted studies that show that changing behavior after a heart attack can improve the chances of recovery. Sixty percent of those hospitalized for heart disease experience elevated levels of stress, anxiety and depression because they've been hospitalized for an attack. In addition, a person's level of depression, social isolation and hostility predict death from heart disease as well as the recurrence of cardiac problems--areas where psychologists can effectively intervene.

Researchers have found that:

- Group therapy for recovering heart patients improves psychological well-being and cuts the death rate in the first three years of recovery.
- Two hours of psychological counseling per week for seven weeks reduces by 60 percent the rate of rehospitalization for heart patients.
- Brief psychological counseling before medical procedures produces shorter stays in the critical-care unit, less emotional distress and shorter hospital stays.

To improve a patient's chance for a successful recovery, psychologists can:

- Educate patients on treatment compliance and healthy behaviors when they are most open to advice--immediately after they are hospitalized;
- Establish effective communication between the patient and family members;
- Help develop a collaborative relationship between the patient, the family and the health-care system; and
- Conduct follow-up assessments to determine how well the patient and family are coping with recovery.

[Click here to take the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory.](#)

### **(c) Copyright 2004 American Psychological Association**

Documents from [apahelpcenter.org](http://apahelpcenter.org) may be reprinted in their entirety with credit given to the American Psychological Association. Any exceptions to this, including requests to excerpt or paraphrase documents from [apahelpcenter.org](http://apahelpcenter.org), must be presented in writing to [helping@apa.org](mailto:helping@apa.org) and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Permission for exceptions will be given on a one-time-only basis and must be sought for each additional use of the document.