



Two **Healthy** Hearts

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Well, they say February is Heart Month, and the heart is certainly the most important muscle in the body. The cardiac (heart) muscle works 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and yet many people do not respect it, and many people do not know how to care for it.

BEFORE CARDIO REHAB

We can remember back in the 60's and 70's when heart patients were kept in bed for weeks and sometimes months after a heart attack. In my own family, we had 3 uncles who had heart attacks in the 1960's, and they were all kept in bed for several months after their heart attack, and they were all just middle aged men. One in particular, was allowed to get up and use the washroom after many weeks in bed, and got back into bed and was dead 10 minutes later. Even when we started our fitness and health business 30 years ago, there were still medical people who were saying that diet and exercise had nothing to do with cardiovascular health, and that it's all in our genes and what we inherit from our parents. We can remember the slow transition in the 70's, 80's and 90's when people began to realize that cardiovascular health is improved with cardiovascular exercise. Now of course, cardio rehab is an essential part of rebuilding the cardiovascular system after a heart attack.

NUTRITION AND EXERCISE

Another important factor in cardiovascular health is diet, and we know that hydrogenated fats like margarine and shortening, which are really plasticized fats, are very unhealthy for the heart and the liver. For more information on nutrition and its role in cardiovascular health, refer to our articles in the Rural Route Magazine: 'Nutrition – The Complete Picture (Part 1)' June 2016; 'Nutrition – The Complete Picture (Part 2)' July/August 2016; and 'Nutrition – The Complete

Picture (Part 3)' September 2016. You can also read all of our past articles on our website www.leggefittness.com/articles, or click on 'Resources' and then 'Articles of Interest' once you're on our website.

For cardiovascular exercise to be effective, it is important to have our heart rate elevated into the age-related target zone several times a week through aerobic exercise. Examples of aerobic exercise would be walking, jogging, biking, cross-country skiing, swimming and rowing. Another option for people to get cardiovascular exercise would be to use a treadmill, elliptical, recumbent bike, upright cycle or rowing machine. For more information on cardiovascular exercise, our target zones, and the health benefits refer to our articles in the Rural Route Magazine: 'Cardiovascular Training For Fitness, Health and Youthfulness' May 2015; 'Cardiovascular Training For Fitness, Health and Youthfulness (Part 2)' June 2015; and 'Cardiovascular Training For Fitness, Heath and Youthfulness (Part 3)' July/August 2015. You can also go to www.leggefittness.com/articles, or click on 'Resources' and then 'Articles of Interest' once you're on our website.

WHAT'S MISSING?

Healthy nutrition, and appropriate cardiovascular exercise are essential for heart health, however there is still something missing in all of this. In fact, there is a lot missing. If we were just a physical body, then a healthy diet and appropriate exercise would be all that matters. But, we are not just a body. We have a mental and emotional part as well. Some people call this mental and emotional part our 'spirit', or our 'soul', or the 'inner person'. Whatever we call it, our mental and emotional part is who we are as a person, and our body is simply where our spirit lives. So, we have a physical mind and heart, but we also have an emotional mind and heart, and they are closely connected.

A person's physical heart can be healthy, but their emotional heart could be damaged or sick. Our emotions have an immediate and direct affect on the functioning of our physical heart. For example, fear, anxiety and stress can cause our pulse to increase, and our blood pressure to rise. The opposite is also true. Relaxation, contentment, peace and happiness can cause our pulse and blood pressure to normalize. So, for us to have a healthy physical heart we also need to have a healthy emotional heart.

BROKEN HEARTS

Probably the most powerful and damaging experience for humans, is the damage caused by broken relationships. Broken relationships often cause a broken heart. There is a saying that some people have died of a 'broken heart'. Of course our physical heart isn't broken, but our emotional heart is.

In our society there is an increasing number of broken hearts, caused by broken relationships. A broken emotional heart has a powerful negative effect on every part of our physical health. The emotional pain of a broken heart can do as much damage to us physically as a physical disease. In fact, long term emotional pain can even cause physical disease. There is increasing evidence that our mental and emotional health has just as strong an effect on our physical health as nutrition and exercise. For example, the guilt, anger and fear that results from broken relationships, can eat away at a person's heart and mind just like cancer can eat away at our physical body.

As we've talked about in our other articles, guilt, anger and fear are the biggest problems we face with mental and emotional health. To the degree that they are replaced with forgiveness, love and peace, our mental and emotional health will improve. It's interesting that our level of mental and emotional health is directly related to the quality

of relationships that we have with family, friends and loved ones. In some of our other articles we have talked in more detail about how to be reconciled to people and how to build good relationships. Four of the main qualities that are essential in creating and building long-term relationships are *patience*, *kindness*, *unselfishness* and *forgiveness*. These four qualities have been referred to as the 'Four Pillars' of building good relationships.

HEALING THE EMOTIONAL HEART

Forgiveness is essential to heal the heart, and to heal relationships, and to reunite and reconcile people with each other. In all relationships people can be hurt both accidentally and intentionally. This is because we all have weaknesses and shortcomings, and we can use the other person to get what we want. Without forgiveness people can continue to hurt each other which will damage the relationship even further.

What is forgiveness? Forgiveness means that I am not going to try and get even, and I'm not going to take revenge. Forgiveness doesn't mean that we approve of the hurtful behaviour, but we're going to overlook it and focus on rebuilding the relationship with patience, kindness and unselfishness. This is not easy to do, nor is it our natural inclination to do this. By nature we want to get even, and we want the other person to suffer, because we are suffering. The problem with getting revenge is that it becomes a 'hurt for hurt' relationship, or an 'evil for evil' relationship, and results in more and more damage to both people. There is a saying that goes, "I'm going to get back at that person, even if it kills me". Trying to get even might not kill a person, but it will certainly damage the relationship, and also damage the emotional hearts of everyone involved.

Confession is part of forgiveness. Confession means recognizing where we have gone wrong, and wanting to change that behaviour. If we don't confess our wrongdoings, then we can't forgive ourselves, and we are burdened with guilt. Also, we can't expect others to forgive us, if we don't confess and repent of the ways we have hurt them.

STEPS TO FORGIVENESS

To learn to practice forgiveness a person must learn the first step, which is practicing *patience*. We have to use self-control and self-discipline to not react in anger. It is important to take the time to cool off, and to look at the big picture. None of us are innocent, and none of us are perfect. We all need to confess, and ask forgiveness for our own mistakes, shortcomings and weaknesses, and for all of the times that we have hurt people by our selfishness. Why should we expect to be forgiven if we are unwilling to forgive others?

Practicing *kindness* is the second step in learning to practice forgiveness. Kindness involves doing good things for people not because they deserve it, but because we want to contribute to their life and to our relationship with them. Showing unconditional love will help heal the wounds in our heart and mind, as well as in the heart and mind of the person who has hurt us.

The third step in learning to practice forgiveness is to learn to practice *unselfishness*. By putting the other person's needs and wants first we are freed from the bondage of selfishness and self-centeredness, and a powerful force is released in the relationship to heal the damage that was done to the heart and mind of the people involved.

The more a person practices the 'Four Pillars' of patience, kindness, unselfishness and forgiveness in their relationships the easier and more natural it becomes. We can't do all of this on our own. We need God's help through prayer, and reading and following the Apostle's instructions to Christians in the New Testament. At first it can seem like learning to ride a bike, however with practice it can become an automatic response. Daily practice is best, and it is important to tell all of the significant people in our life that we want to improve our relationship with them. They might resist, and they might think that it is unnecessary, or even impossible. But don't be discouraged. If we quietly incorporate these 'Four Pillars' into our attitude and personality, we will see subtle and positive changes in our heart and mind, and also in the attitudes of our family and loved ones. It's a process and a journey, but don't

give up. We will eventually be blessed over and over again by the improvement in our relationships with the important people in our life. As a result, our physical health, and also our emotional and mental health will improve.

OTHER RESOURCES

Some good articles to read in the Rural Route Magazine would be: 'Improving Mental and Emotional Health' (Dec 2014/Jan 2015); 'The 4 Pillars Of Building Good Relationships' (Feb. 2015); 'Roadblocks To Building Good Relationships' (March 2015); 'Completing The Framework For Building Good Relationships' (April 2015); 'Freedom Through Partnering' (April 2016); 'The Family Is A Precious Partnership' (May 2016); and 'A Serious Health Concern' (October 2016). You can also go to www.leggefittness.com/articles, or click on 'Resources' and then 'Articles of Interest' once you're on our website.

In summary, it's important to remember that good nutrition and cardiovascular exercise are essential to improve heart health. However, by covering all the bases and looking at the quality of our relationships, and our ability to build better relationships we can improve both our physical heart health, and our emotional heart health as well.

Our article next month will be called, 'Exercise On A Shoe String Budget'. We will be talking about how to have a fitness program without spending any money or buying any equipment. Read all about it in the next issue of the Rural Route Magazine. Don't miss it!



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