

## ***How a Broken Heart Can Land You in the ER***

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Remember that first kiss?

Cupid, the God of Love is known for shooting arrows into people causing them to fall deeply in love with each other and has become the symbol for Valentine's Day. And the ritual of sending our sweetheart love letters originated from the legend of St. Valentine, a Roman who was martyred for refusing to give up Christianity. Before his death on February 14th, 269 A. D., he left a letter for his love interest and signed it "From Your Valentine." Over time, February 14th has become the date for exchanging love letters and St. Valentine became the patron saint of lovers.

According to recent medical research, reviewing the romantic significance of Valentine's Day and the work of Cupid might be helpful for our hearts.

In fact, data supports the notion of "make love not war" when it comes to relationships and may have important cardiovascular implications.

### **Lovers' Quarrels can Break Your Heart**

The Broken Heart Syndrome is a peculiar and occasionally lethal cardiac condition that often mimics a heart attack and can be triggered by an intense emotional experience such as a marital spat or domestic abuse. These emotionally charged events lead to sudden surges in stress hormones (adrenaline) which cause a rapid and profound decline in cardiac function. Fortunately, unlike a heart attack the condition is usually reversible.

In a study published in the NEJM, 19 patients with the broken heart syndrome were mostly postmenopausal women with additional triggers included grieving over the death of a loved one, armed robbery, court appearance and public speaking.

Additional research relating spousal arguing patterns and cardiac events was published in the Archives of Internal Medicine in 2007. The study showed that arguing with your spouse could be hazardous to your cardiovascular health and that individuals who experienced high levels of negativity in their close personal relationships — especially marriage — were 1.34 times more likely to experience chest pain, heart attacks and even sudden cardiac death.

### **Have a Heart on Valentine's Day**

So, in the spirit of Cupid and St. Valentine, think of Love not War on Valentine's Day. Imagine how you fell in love with your spouse. Remember how you first met, your first

kiss, sunset and romantic walk on the beach.

And although chocolate and flowers are always nice, my prescription this Valentine's Day is to write a love letter—it will no doubt be a pleasurable and heart healthy experience for you and your spouse.

*Dr. John Kennedy is an invasive cardiologist and board member of the American Heart Association. He has a particular interest in the negative impact of stress on our cardiovascular system and speaks regularly to businesses about managing stress in the workplace. Dr. Kennedy is co-author of the book "Breathe: Heal Your Heart in Just 15 Minutes a Day," which will be released by John Wiley & Sons in March 2009.*



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