

Out of Rhythm & the Blues

By John M. Kennedy, MD, FACC

Date Published: May 29, 2009

The "*blues*" describes a music genre that originated in the late 1700s and included songs typically composed of melancholy lyrics often performed by artists in depressed moods.

This powerful and soulful music reflected the struggles and conflicts of people living in troubled times. Relationship woes, financial difficulty, racial tension, and lost loved ones were common themes.

Today, much of the popularity and success of the well known 'Rhythm and Blues,' a.k.a. 'R and B,' can be directly attributed to these early roots.

It turns out, the relationship between our *heart rhythm* and *the blues*, or *depression*, may have a literal significance--especially as they relate to women and cardiovascular health.

Heart Cold Facts--Depression and Heart Disease

In a recent study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, researchers showed that women with depression were at increased risk for developing cardiovascular events. The study included over 63,000 women from the Nurses' Health study without prior history of heart disease or stroke. They were followed over 8 years and results showed that those with depressive symptoms had a higher likelihood of heart attack and Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD) compared to those without depressive symptoms.

Similarly, a study from the Women's Health Initiative also found that depressive symptoms were associated with higher risk of fatal cardiovascular events over a 4 year follow up period. In addition, two meta-analyses where multiple studies were combined showed that depression conferred a 1.6-fold increase in coronary heart disease.

Linking the Heart Rhythm to the Blues

Depression is known to be a marker for poor prognosis after a heart attack and, as previously mentioned, it may also be an independent risk factor for coronary heart disease, similar to high blood pressure and cholesterol. Some of the proposed mechanisms linking heart disease and depression include:

- increased inflammation
- thick, sticky blood

- increased adrenaline
- decreased heart rate variability

Good News for the Blues

- The "Sad Heart" study found that heart failure patients given the antidepressant *medication* had 23 percent fewer cardiovascular events than a control group. And although the results were not statistically significant, researchers are continuing to study treatment for depression for patients with heart failure.
- *Exercise* may also be a lifesaver for depressed heart patients. According to the results of a national study led by Duke University, heart attack patients who are depressed or without social support are more than twice as likely to die of a second heart attack if they do not exercise.
- Two other common interventions for depression--*psychotherapy and counseling*--significantly improve depression and improve quality of life for heart patients. However, they have not been shown to reduce mortality from heart disease.

In summary

Data suggests that heart disease and depression are undoubtedly linked. So if you are feeling down and a little blue, whether you have heart disease or not, seek medical advice, it will help protect your heart. And while you're cheering up listening to music, skip the blues and pick something upbeat that makes you want to get up and dance--it will be therapeutic in more ways than one.

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 in 2009.



John M. Kennedy, MD, FACC

For speaking engagements, please contact:
Caryn Shehi at Speakers Management
Address: 16344 Sharon Way
Grass Valley, CA 95949
Phone: 1-530-277-2008
Email: info@speakersmanagement.com
Website: <http://www.speakersmanagement.com/>