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## How to Nourish Your Emotional Heart

### Heart Health for Everyone

BY LINDA EGENES



**The heart is more than just another organ in your body. According to ayurveda, it's also the seat of the emotions.**

As Valentine's Day rolls around, we naturally get involved in matters of the heart. Yet when it comes to strengthening the emotional heart the rest of the year, many of us haven't a clue.

Maharishi Ayurveda offers a unique view of the emotional heart. Just as there is a digestive fire in the stomach that metabolizes food, there is a similar function that metabolizes emotions. When this metabolic function, known as Sadhaka Pitta, is set too high, it can cause explosive emotions and irrational behavior. When it's set too low, the person takes a long time to process negative emotions, making it impossible to let go and move on.

The secret to emotional health, then, is to balance the metabolic functions of the heart so you can relate to those around you in a loving, calm, and positive way. And because the emotions affect the body, balancing emotional stress is essential for keeping the physical heart healthy, too.

Here are ten ways to reduce emotional stress the ayurvedic way.

**1. When you feel emotionally stirred up, drink a cup of rose petal herbal tea with milk.**

Roses have long been used to alleviate depression, anxiety, insomnia, and irritability. Milk also has a soothing effect on the emotions, but it's easier to digest if you heat it to the boiling point first. Add cooling flavor with a pinch of cardamom or a teaspoon of rose petal jam, and let the milk cool before drinking.

**2. Eat foods that are especially nourishing to the heart,** including mature pomegranate fruit or juice; asparagus; sweet, juicy, seasonal fruits; rose petal jam; sweet yogurt drinks (lassi); avocado; and leafy greens. In general, eat more sweet, bitter, and astringent foods. Rather than eating a lot of seafood or red meat (which increase heat in the body), meet some of your protein requirements with soups made of small legumes, such as lentils or split mung beans.

**3. Avoid excessively spicy and acidic foods such as chilies and tomatoes.** Use cooling spices to flavor your food, like the Heart Healthy Spice Mixture:

- 1 part ground turmeric
- 2 parts ground cumin
- ]• 3 parts ground coriander
- 4 parts ground fennel

Mix the spices and store airtight. When it is time to cook the meal, steam the vegetables. Melt a small amount of ghee in the pan and add enough spices to flavor the amount of vegetables you are cooking. Sauté the spices until the flavor is released. Add the vegetables, sauté lightly, add salt and pepper to taste, and serve immediately. Both the weather and the foods you eat can quickly cause an imbalance in your physiology. When it's hot outside, eat sweet, cooling foods.

**4. Exercise every day.** This helps keep digestion and elimination regular, cleanses toxins from the body, and releases endorphins, the hormones that are associated with a happy mood. According to Maharishi Ayurveda, it's better to schedule half an hour of exercise every day rather than overdoing it three times a week. You can vary the intensity and type of exercise depending on your body type and strength. For people who are of slight build and tend to have trouble gaining weight, it's better to start with gentle exercise such as yoga or walking. For people who are more competitive, team sports will be more appealing. And those with a sturdier build may need to increase the speed and intensity in order to stimulate their slower metabolism and stay in balance.

**5. No matter what your body type, avoid overexertion of all kinds—both mental and physical.** Working too hard, either physically or mentally, can cause the emotions to go out of balance. Plan leisure time every day, time for pure enjoyment. Listen to music, chat with your friends, take a moonlight stroll. Taking the time to appreciate the tranquil beauty of nature calms the heart.

**6. Avoid skipping or delaying meals.** This is so important for people who have a high digestive fire and may suddenly feel emotional when they are hungry. One of the best ways to avoid squabbles among the kids on family outings is to simply plan to eat regular meals. Schedule your main meal at noon, when your digestive fire is at its brightest and can metabolize food more efficiently.

**7. Massage yourself every day with a cooling oil such as coconut oil.** Ayurvedic oil massage releases toxins, improves blood circulation, and can help restore balance to body and mind.

**8. Create a home environment that is pleasing and restful to the senses.** Avoid watching too much TV at night, especially violent movies or shows. Rose aroma oil creates a soothing atmosphere and a cooling effect on the emotions.

**9. Get your rest.** Research shows that stress levels (and heart disease) soars among people who habitually stay up late. The body's metabolic functions naturally shut down around 10 p.m.—so if you stay up and snack it disturbs the heart's need to rest, recuperate, and cleanse. Try sleeping early two nights in a row and you'll not only rest deeper, you'll feel more emotionally balanced, too.

**10. Nourish your emotional heart.** Make it a point to tell your loved ones why they are special to you. Practice gratitude and respect with your family and it will soon become a habit, generating the positive hormones and neuro-chemical reactions that create health instead of disease. Remember, your heart health depends more on the feelings you project rather than the feelings you receive.

And remember to take care of your physical heart, too. After all, it's hard to overflow with love if you are ill. And to protect your heart, make sure your cholesterol levels are healthy, with a proper balance of good and bad cholesterol. February is National Heart Month—a reminder to schedule a checkup. You owe it to yourself and the people you love.

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