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ISSUE 23



**“I tell my patients that we have to treat this issue of overwhelming stress in their lives, and TM is an evidence-based technique that has been shown to reduce blood pressure, heart attacks and strokes by 48 percent. The American Heart Association recommends it as the most effective stress management tool for reducing hypertension.”—Dr. Suzanne Steinbaum, Director of Women’s Heart Health, Lenox Hill Hospital**

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## What Every Woman Can Do to Prevent Heart Disease

### Dr. Suzanne Steinbaum on Heart Health for Women

BY LINDA EGENES

Cardiologist Suzanne Steinbaum, MD, is a woman on a mission. As Director of Women and Heart Disease at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City and author of the life-changing *Dr. Suzanne Steinbaum’s Heart Book: Every Woman’s Guide to a Heart-Healthy Life*, she is teaching women a new, heart-centered way to live.

And she is succeeding. While many doctors complain that their patients don’t want to make the lifestyle changes that will truly transform their health, Dr. Steinbaum doesn’t have that problem.

You only have to talk to Dr. Steinbaum for a few minutes to find out why she calls herself a *preventive* cardiologist. When a patient comes to her office who has not been feeling well for a long time, Dr. Steinbaum gets the patient talking about her unhealthy food choices, her lack of exercise, and the stressors in her life. And then she motivates the patient to change.

“It seems to me that there are two options,” she says. “You can pull out your pad and write a prescription, or you can actually help them change their lives, which is something that they own forever. There is nothing more powerful than that.”

Dr. Steinbaum’s enthusiasm for transforming women’s heart health is contagious.

As a national spokesperson for the Go Red for Women campaign, as a featured guest on *20/20*, *Good Morning America*, and major networks, and as the host of her TV show, *Focus OnHealth*, she is reaching out to women all over the country.

It’s not only passion for her work that fuels Dr. Steinbaum’s success; it’s authenticity. She has lived what she teaches from an early age.

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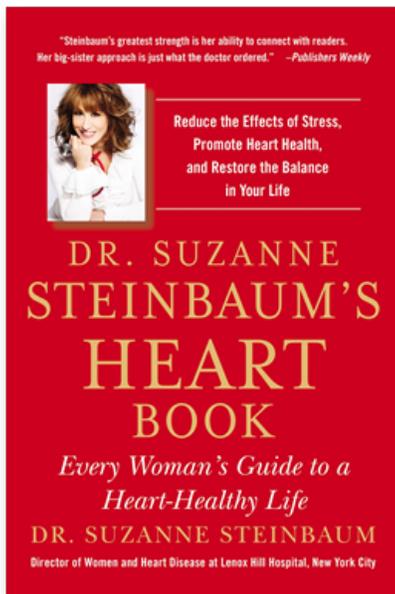
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### Dr. Steinbaum's Top Five Heart-Health Tips

1. Never smoke
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3. Eat heart-healthy foods
4. Reduce stress with Transcendental Meditation
5. Live from your heart

### Tackling the Myths of Women's Heart Health

Like her grandfather and father, Steinbaum first trained as a doctor of osteopathy. Two things happened that altered the course of her career.



“It’s important that you incorporate habits in your life that aren’t a burden. They have to add to your life, not make it more difficult. I think that TM is one of the easiest things to do. It’s certainly one of the

In creating the future of women’s medicine, Dr. Steinbaum looked to her past. “When I was writing *Dr. Suzanne Steinbaum’s Heart Book*, I realized that it was my story that drove me to do what I do,” she says.

Her story begins with her grandfather, who, as an athletic teen, was told by his doctor he could not play high school football because of a heart murmur. “He couldn’t understand why a doctor would tell him he was sick when he felt perfectly healthy,” says Steinbaum. “So he decided to learn more about the body, driving to New York City from New Jersey to take classes in nutrition.”

Eventually he became a doctor of osteopathy, which is a more hands-on field of medicine that focuses on holistic healing, beginning a family tradition that now includes eighteen doctors of osteopathy in the Steinbaum family.

Through his research, Steinbaum’s grandfather knew that nutrition affected the heart, and favored foods that modern research has found to be heart-healthy, such as avocados and dark chocolate. “Years later, when I was in my training, I wrote an article on nutrition and prevention of heart disease,” says Steinbaum. “Then I found out my grandfather wrote almost the exact same article in the 1930s. It felt strange, almost surreal. I wondered, ‘Is this genetic?’ ”

Whether nature or nurture, Steinbaum knew she wanted to be a doctor from an early age. As a child she followed her father on his hospital rounds on the weekend, and found it great fun to “assist” her grandfather in his home office.

“I was raised with the belief system that everyone is a holistic being, and you can’t treat just one aspect of the body,” she says.

“As a student I was working in the emergency room, and a relatively young-looking woman was wheeled in sweating and vomiting,” she remembers. “The doctors diagnosed it as gastroenteritis and left her to wait in the corner. She had a heart attack right there in the ER. I thought, ‘That’s what I am going to do; help women not get heart attacks.’ ”

Years later, Steinbaum ended up doing a rotation at Block Island in Rhode Island. She was shocked to see a parade of young women visiting her office complaining of heart palpitations and chest pains while on vacation with their families.

“And I thought, ‘What is this?’ ” she says. “I could see that these highly successful, but highly stressed, women needed help. These two things have stayed in my heart my entire career.”

Propelled by the desire to educate women to recognize and prevent heart disease, she went on to become board certified as an MD and a Fellow of the American College of Cardiology.

Dr. Steinbaum likes to point out that although heart disease is thought to be a man’s disease, it is actually the number one killer of women. And because the symptoms are different in women than in men, many doctors don’t recognize the early signs of heart disease—or even heart attacks—in women.

“There is an increased incidence of heart disease in women less

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most effective.”

than fifty-five years old,” she says. “Women need to start early to prevent it, especially if there is a family history.”

Dr. Steinbaum says the significance of prevention for heart disease was what drew her to the field. “It was so compelling to be able to change the outcomes of people’s lives by simply helping them to change their lifestyles,” she says. “If I could teach people how to prevent the number one killer disease, what could be better than that?”

### What Every Woman Can Do to Prevent Heart Disease

When I ask her to name the three most important things women can do for their hearts, Dr. Steinbaum says, “I used to say ‘stop smoking’ first, but now most people are on that bandwagon. Now I’d say eating a really healthy diet, and exercising, which, by far, is the best medication. And having a way to reduce stress is essential.”

For stress, Dr. Steinbaum recommends the Transcendental Meditation technique.

“I tell my patients that we have to treat this issue of overwhelming stress in their lives, and this is an evidence-based technique that has been shown to reduce blood pressure, heart attacks, and strokes by 48 percent,” she says. “The American Heart Association recommends it as the most effective stress management tool for reducing hypertension.”

She says she first recommended TM because she was impressed with the research. “And then I learned it myself, and thought, ‘Oh this is huge! This is a really, really big deal; something that goes far beyond the medical benefits. One of my favorite things to say is that I never thought I could sit still that long, and now I look forward to it. I also say, ‘Trust me on this one; this is going to work.’”

As a working mother of an eight-year-old, Dr. Steinbaum herself is no stranger to the stress of modern life. “Every day I have about twenty-five million things to do, and before I did TM it sometimes was an overwhelming, daunting task,” she says. “Now that I do TM, it doesn’t mean I have less to do; it just means that it’s easier and calmer. There’s a lack of chaotic thought, and it’s almost like everything falls in place.”

TM offers a way out of the vicious cycle of stress, notes Dr. Steinbaum. “If you can meditate regularly and slow your breathing, slow your heart rate, dilate your arteries, and decrease your blood pressure, it’s done!”



“Doing what is best for you, eating what feels best for you, exercising, living with *passion*, living with *purpose*—that is what living from the heart is all about. And, ultimately, that is the way to be the most heart healthy.”

But just like exercise or changing your diet, you have to do it regularly to create the change in the physiology. “We know that the change is persistent if you make a regular, routine practice of it,” she says.

For Steinbaum, any healthy habit has to resonate with a person’s goals and lifestyle. “It’s important that you incorporate things in your life that aren’t a burden,” she says. “They have to add to your life, not make it more difficult. I think that TM is one of the easiest things to do. It’s certainly one of the most effective.”

### Living from the Heart

Dr. Steinbaum calls her philosophy of preventing heart disease “living from the heart.”

When she speaks, her belief in her patients’ ability to transform their lives is palpable.

“Doing what is best for you, eating what feels best for you, exercising, living with *passion*, living with *purpose*—that is what living from the heart is all about,” she says. “And, ultimately, that is the way to be the most heart healthy.”

She advises her patients: “Live from your heart and everything else will be fine.”

To help her patients become more aware of who they are and what they need to feel healthy, Dr. Steinbaum leads them in an exercise called “journaling their lives.”

“When people get caught in the minutiae of their own existence, it’s unhealthy, so I try to get people to step outside of themselves and to understand what they are living for,” she says. “For instance, a woman might feel motivated to lose weight so she can enjoy playing with her grandchildren.”

Later on, feeling good itself is enough motivation to eat heart-healthy foods, Dr. Steinbaum explains. But in

the beginning, it's easier for people to tie their goal to something larger than themselves.

"I want to lose weight to look thinner' is usually not enough motivation," she says.

Dr. Steinbaum has clearly poured her heart into her mission of educating women and preventing heart disease, and it's her biggest reward when she sees a patient living from her heart and feeling better.

"I feel lucky to be a part of that transformation," she says. "It's amazing. Simply amazing."

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