

**Splurge** - Volume 7 Issue 6 (June 2012)

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## **BROKEN HEART SYNDROME**

Broken hearts have been inspiring poets and songwriters for centuries. There's a reason for this, beyond waxing philosophical or romantic. When a person refers to their heart "swelling" while looking at someone they love, or feeling the heart "crushed" at the thought of someone they lost, they aren't just being metaphoric.

Anyone who's experienced loss has felt the tug of the heartstrings, the pain in the chest or stomach that comes from unrequited love, loss, etc. The overwhelming majority of critical cardiac events occur because of blockages in the arteries, either causing stroke or a heart attack.

Yet in some uncommon circumstances, a person can experience an event that mimics a heart attack, called "stress-induced cardiomyopathy" otherwise known as broken heart syndrome. In these instances, intense emotional or physical stress causes rapid and severe weakness of the heart muscle. Studies show that between 1 and 3 % of patients presenting with heart attack symptoms meet the criteria for this diagnosis.

Broken heart syndrome typically follows intense emotional occurrences such as grief (especially sudden loss of a loved one), extreme fear, rage, or surprise. In other cases, this type of cardiomyopathy can occur following certain physical stressors such as stroke, seizure, or asthma attack or emphysema.

**A little pain in my heart just  
won't let me be  
wake up at restless nights Lord,  
and I can't even sleep  
Stop this little pain in my heart  
~ Otis Redding, "Pain in my Heart"**

For reasons not entirely understood, most patients who experience this condition tend to be post-menopausal females, although one of the hallmarks of the condition is its unpredictability. Patients can have low blood pressure, shock, lack of consciousness, and heart rhythm abnormalities, especially in the minutes and hours after a sudden, devastating shock.

The good news is that most of the time this condition improves quickly. However, as with any type of cardiac event, if any of the symptoms arise (shortness of breath, chest pain, low blood pressure, etc.), call 911 and see a medical professional. Make sure to talk about the circumstances surrounding the event, as this gives the attending physicians more information to draw from for proper treatment and diagnosis.

The heart is a fascinating organ, at once resilient and vulnerable. The heart can be scarred, broken, damaged, and healed. In many spiritual practices, we are told to open our hearts to love, friends, and God.

Most recent studies on the subject of trauma show that intensely jarring experiences can heavily impact our bodies, whether that be our minds, our hearts, or our affects on behavioral patterns. Protect your heart by managing stress, exercising, and reach out to loved ones or a healing professional whenever you feel overwhelmed by grief or loss. Connection to those who care about you can literally save your life, and definitely make it worth every moment of living.

Listen to Dr. Galichia's Radio Show – "Take Your Health to Heart" every Saturday from 11 AM to Noon on 1480 KQAM in Wichita. If you have any medically related questions, please call us during the LIVE broadcast at 1-800-TALK-997 or 1-800-825-5997. You can also e-mail your questions anytime to

**[GalichiaRadio@Galichia.com](mailto:GalichiaRadio@Galichia.com)**. We would love to hear from you!!!

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