Determined Not to Have a Heart Attack

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Previous research has shown that people with a history of major depression are at an increased risk of a heart attacks. Now, a new study reported by Reuters Health, shows that people with anxiety disorders might also be at higher risk.

As part of the study, researchers examined the health records of 97,000 veterans. The researchers found that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), panic disorder and generalized anxiety were all linked to heart attack risk independently of depression. That doesn't mean that mental illness causes heart attacks. In fact, it could simply be that people suffering from psychological disorders are more likely to adopt unhealthy habits that put them at greater risk of cardiovascular disease--a situation I know all too well.

Just as my mood has swung high and low over the years, I have had a love/hate relationship with exercise and healthy eating. I was physically active as a young person, stayed trim in my 20s and exercised regularly though out most of my 30s. Then, I got slammed with the most severe depression I'd ever experienced when I was 38. That's when everything healthy went out the window. I sought comfort wherever I could find it and once my appetite returned, comfort usually had something to do with cheese and butter. Unfortunately, endless bowls of macaroni and cheese, combined with a medication notorious for weight gain, meant that I gained nearly 40 pounds. Oh, and on top of that I also smoked from the age of 16 until I turned 40. I was on the fast track to a triple bypass.

Now, however, I'm feeling very ready to clean up my act again. For the last year I've significantly improved my diet, eating an abundance of whole grains, healthy fats like olive oil, and loads of vegetables. My partner and I are taking longer and more strenuous walks, and I'm feeling ready to start pumping iron again and to up the ante on some serious heart-pumping cardio training. The new study has provided me with yet another powerful motivator to make good on this promise to myself: that I simply refuse to be another statistic and to die from a heart attack.

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