



Legacy of Heart



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Why experts say a good mood can lead to good health

It doesn't take a scientist to understand that laughter feels good, while anger feels awful. But it does take one to explain why one of these feelings can boost the immune system, while the other can wear it down, damage the heart and increase the risk for dementia.

Simply put: Mood can influence your health. Studies show negative emotions – including anger, hostility and pessimism – are linked to a higher risk of heart disease and lower chance of recovery from events such as heart attacks, as well as poorer cognitive health. Conversely, a growing body of research shows feelings such as happiness, optimism, gratitude, a sense of purpose, well-being or satisfaction in life lead to better heart and brain health.

Strong, negative feelings, such as anger, and stress, such as from anxiety or depression, activate the amygdala, the region in the brain that handles emotion. It activates the body's "fight or flight" response, triggering the release of cortisol and adrenaline, hormones that make the heart beat faster and blood pressure rise. It also can cause blood platelets to form clots, and trigger plaque in the heart or brain to rupture, causing a heart attack or stroke. Prolonged stress also increases inflammation and lowers the body's immune response.

This biological response may be compounded by harmful behaviors. People with poor coping mechanisms for stress may sleep poorly, engage in binge eating and exercise less. On the flip side, lowering stress through positive feelings also affects brain circuitry.

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Mindfulness, humor and other mental coping skills can help people stay healthier by reducing the amount of cortisol running through their bodies. And research shows anything good for the heart is good for the brain.

People don't have to be naturally cheery or easygoing to reap these benefits. You can cultivate positive thinking and mindfulness and coping mechanisms to deal with adversity. Staying physically active also helps to boost mood, as does spending time with friends and family to build strong social support.

The better someone feels, the more likely they are to maintain their health. Optimistic people take better care of themselves. They are more compliant with medication, more likely to get checkups, to eat healthy and exercise, say experts.

It's never too late to make a difference. The brain is very retrainable. The older we get, the more difficult it is to do, but it can be done and your heart and brain will thank you.

Love, Loss, and a Lasting Legacy

Jesus (Jesse) Robles is no stranger to grief. He has been surrounded by loss since before he can even remember. Having already lost all but one grandparent by the time he was a young child, he was shaken to the core the day he and his siblings were playing outside with their beloved paternal grandfather who suddenly collapsed on the ground in front of them. He had suffered a major heart attack and could not be revived.

Years later, his father also suffered a heart attack and had a pacemaker installed. Unfortunately just weeks later, the pacemaker started failing. During a surgery for its replacement, with cruel timing of it being on his mom's birthday, his father encountered complications and passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. Just six months later, he lost his mom. "She died from a broken heart," Jesse said. Jesse's heart was broken, too, and sadly the losses kept coming. Over the course of the years that followed, Jesse lost four sisters, and never having had any children, found himself with no remaining family other than his longtime partner, Mark.

Though Jesse lacked family, he did not lack love. Both teachers, Mark and Jesse lived a wonderful life surrounded by neighbors, friends, and their beloved pup, Perelli. They enjoyed traveling, walking, gardening, and Mark had a special interest in woodworking. "Mark was always moving," Jesse said. "He never wanted to sit down." Their healthy, energetic lifestyle was paying off – during a routine physical, Mark's doctor gave him a shining clean bill of health.

That's why it was so hard for Jesse to comprehend the phone call he received just 15 days after Mark's physical from a nurse at the local hospital alerting him that Mark had suffered a major heart attack and was in ICU.



Jesse (left) with Perelli and Mark

Miraculously, Mark's life was saved, but the next 45 days they spent in the hospital were a blur. Eventually they returned home, focused on recovery, but it was not long before it became clear that Mark's health was deteriorating. While on a wait list for both a heart and kidney transplant, sadly Mark's body could no longer withstand the failing organs and he passed away in 2019, the day before Valentine's Day and just weeks shy of their 34th anniversary.

The loss was gutting. Alone for the first time in over three decades on Valentine's Day, Jesse said, "I had no one. I was completely alone." For several months Jesse shut down, not willing to see or talk to the friends and neighbors that checked in on him frequently. "Losing someone like that is very hard," he said, "but I knew I had to do something." Feeling a tug on his heart to do something in Mark's honor, and knowing he had no family to leave his and Mark's estate to, he made a call to the American Heart Association and was immediately connected to an Advisor who helped him review his options.

Jesse decided that designating the American Heart Association to receive a percentage of a stock investment account felt right. "In my heart I know I'm doing a really great thing for Mark," shared Jesse. He is comforted knowing the gift he is leaving to honor Mark may one day save someone else's life. "Always remember, life is short," Jesse said. "Enjoy every minute with the ones you love."

To learn more about leaving a gift through your will or estate plan, fill out our online form at [Heart.org/LOHFeb23](https://heart.org/LOHFeb23) to get your free brochure, *Your Will and Estate Planning Guide*. Questions? Contact us at PlannedGiving@heart.org or 888-227-5242.



A Unique Way to Create a Greater Impact



Eric & Autum Edwards

Some people have a calling so strong that it simply cannot be ignored. For Eric Edwards, that calling was an inexplicable draw to the medical field which led him to join the local rescue squad and become an EMT right out of high school while also pursuing his medical degree.

Working in and studying the emergency medical field, he saw firsthand how crucial CPR and urgent medication delivery methods are in the chain of survival. Not only did this realization motivate Eric to become a CPR instructor, it also spurred a brief hiatus from medical school where he teamed up with his twin brother to launch a pharmaceutical company that went on to invent several emergency life-saving devices. Eric not only finished medical school, but he obtained his PhD in Pharmaceutical Sciences, all while continuing to ride on the ambulance and train other advanced life support providers.

During his calls as a first responder, Eric frequently encountered patients suffering with uncontrolled high blood pressure and other health challenges that stemmed directly from inequities in access to healthcare and medications, an issue he would become passionate about. Both Eric and wife Autum were touched by heart disease in their own close circles of family and friends as well. Both of their fathers suffered, and recovered from, massive heart attacks and their world was rocked when a close friend and employee of Eric's at the time died from sudden cardiac arrest. "When it's personal and happens to a loved one," said Eric, "it's different. It makes it real."

Despite their impossibly busy schedules as working parents of three kids, when they were approached to get more involved with the American Heart Association in Richmond, "no wasn't even a choice," Autum said. "We felt like the work of the AHA was so important, it was perfect timing." "We wanted to play a significant role and lead by example," they said, first making a substantial three-year corporate gift to fund blood pressure education in their community, and then stepping up as chairs of the 2022 Richmond Heart Ball.

They began to explore their options to make a personal contribution as well. "There were a lot of great reasons to consider giving through a donor advised fund, a DAF" said Eric. In addition to the tax benefits, they enjoyed knowing that through a DAF, their gift would be invested and could increase over time. "What better way to show our commitment to a cause we really believe in," they said, "than through a process that allows our contribution to grow above and beyond the initial investment. The process is easy to do, seamless, and it's a unique way to have a greater impact than just a single gift."

5 Reasons to Love Donor Advised Funds

- Donor advised funds (DAFs) can have multiple account advisors allowing families to grow in philanthropy together.
- DAFs simplify donation record keeping. You only have to track your contributions into your DAF for income tax purposes, eliminating having to save receipts from multiple organizations.
- Funds within a DAF are invested and could potentially grow, providing more money for your favorite causes.
- You receive an immediate tax deduction, while deciding what charitable grants you want to make.
- DAFs make it easy to contribute non-cash gifts in support of your favorite charities.

To receive more information on creating an American Heart Association DAF, fill out our online form at [Heart.org/LOHFeb23](https://heart.org/LOHFeb23). Questions? Contact us at PlannedGiving@heart.org or 888-227-5242.



For Valentine's Day we give gifts and tokens of our love to those we hold dear. But what about through estate planning? How can you show your family and loved ones that you care?



Maria A. Fernandez,
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By planning for the future with a well-documented and thoughtful estate plan that, at a minimum, includes these three basic documents:

1. Last Will and Testament

One's will disposes of your material possessions upon your death, naming a personal representative to distribute possessions and deal with any creditors. If you have minor children, you also name a guardian to take care of them until they reach the age of maturity. Ideally, it is prepared by an attorney and meets all the requirements, so it is accepted by the Court when it is to be probated.

2. Durable Power of Attorney

A durable power of attorney names an attorney in fact or an agent to act on your behalf in the event you are unable to do so. If you are ill or incapacitated, you grant them the power to pay your bills using your own funds. They owe you a duty to care for you and not misuse the funds or property. If durable, it continues in effect while you are incapacitated.

3. Advance Directive or Living Will

An advance directive or living will usually names one or more persons to act on your behalf as it relates to end-of-life medical care and decision making. It would set out your wishes if you were unable to make your own choices and provide guidance on how you wish for them to act. There are other documents and planning that can occur that would assist family members and loved ones should you be critically ill or dying. Do not resuscitate orders and medical powers of attorney are also available.

In terms of planning, one can provide for family through additional methods, including prepaid funeral planning and revocable trust agreements. Charitable remainder trust agreements and charitable gift annuities provide income for both family members and charitable organizations that one may wish to benefit. Consult your attorney and other professional advisors and give those you love a different kind of gift next year!



Apples with Almond- Apricot Sauce

Ingredients:

- Cooking spray
- 2 tablespoons water
- 2 large apples, halved and cored
- 1/4 cup chopped almonds
- 2 tablespoons chopped dried apricots
- 2 tablespoons dark brown sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger (or) allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon light tub margarine

Directions:

- Lightly spray the slow cooker with cooking spray. Pour in the water. Add the apple halves with the cut side up.
- In a small bowl, stir together the remaining ingredients except the margarine. Spoon onto each apple half. Top each with 1 teaspoon margarine. Cook, covered, on low for 2 to 2 1/2 hours or on high for 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes, or until just tender. Be careful not to overcook; the apples will continue to cook while cooling.
- Carefully transfer the apples to plates, leaving the sauce in the slow cooker. Stir the sauce. Spoon over the apples. Let cool completely, about 30 minutes. The sauce will thicken slightly while cooling.

Serving Size: 1/2 apple, 1 tablespoon sauce

Calories	Protein	Fiber
149	2g	4g

Find this and more heart-healthy recipes at Recipes.Heart.org.