

Broken Heart Continued

I was gaining weight and couldn't understand why because my diet was simple, mostly plant-based foods and no sweets.

I joined the gym in the spring of that year and I was required to see their hospital doctor who was in charge of the program before I started with a trainer. He took my blood pressure. It was 198/100. I had no idea. I thought I was fine.

But for my age less than 130/80 was normal. He took it again, same thing. Then he left the room and returned without his white lab coat on - as some of his patients experienced "white coat syndrome," he said, which might be causing a stress reaction that was skyrocketing my blood pressure.

My numbers went even higher. The doctor said he thought I was having a heart attack and that I should go to the emergency room immediately. Needless to say, when I arrived, all alone, I was frightened out of my wits.

I was ushered into an exam room and a cardiac team of five came in and quickly administered a battery of tests to determine my danger level.

They admitted me to a private room, hooked me up to a heart monitoring machine, gave me some calming medicine, and ran more tests in anticipation of an echocardiogram the next morning.

After the echocardiogram, the head cardiologist arrived, looked at the test results and sat next to me on the examination table.

"Diana, your heart chambers are completely clear."

Then he gently held my hand and continued, "I read your chart and understand that you are going through a very difficult time and you have been for the past few years.

Even though your heart is healthy, I do believe, you have a broken heart.

I want to keep you here one more night and will have a social worker talk with you and also help you to find ongoing support after you are discharged from our care."

Did the chief cardiologist just diagnose me with a broken heart?

"Finally, your cortisol levels are very high and that, along with the amount of stress you are trying to manage can cause a heart attack even with clear heart chambers."

Once I recovered from the astonishment of being told by the senior heart specialist that I had a broken heart, I actually felt really relieved and comforted, despite the fact that I had been feeling, on top of everything else, vulnerable and over-weight and self-conscious in the ill-fitting hospital gown.

The handholding was very effective.

As they were wheeling me back to my room, I realized that, for once in my life, I felt extremely validated.

I think I got it.

My body was trying to adapt and during times of increased stress, cortisol and adrenaline are released from your adrenal glands.

This triggers an increase in heart rate and energy levels, preparing your body for a potentially harmful situation – which can be very useful if you are being chased by a saber tooth tiger. But when it is chronic it can be devastating to your mental and physical health.

For someone who has struggled with trauma I can tell you that chronic, excessive stress can undermine your health in ways that can go quite unnoticed but are still destructive.

I had no idea the terrible things my trauma's silent narrative was telling my body to do.

It is our hope that our blog articles today will help you better understand these dynamics and get the support you need.

We wish you a most Healthy and Happy June!

Diana and Jan

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"It tells the story of my son and his journey from deep despair during years of being bullied to thriving beyond anything we could have imagined.

~ Diana

