

FEBRUARY 2026



**HUNGERFORD**

CPAs • ADVISORS • TECHNOLOGY • WEALTH

## **02 How Stress Led to a Broken Heart (Syndrome)**

Emily Paszkowski

## **05 THE BENEFITS OF COUNSELING**

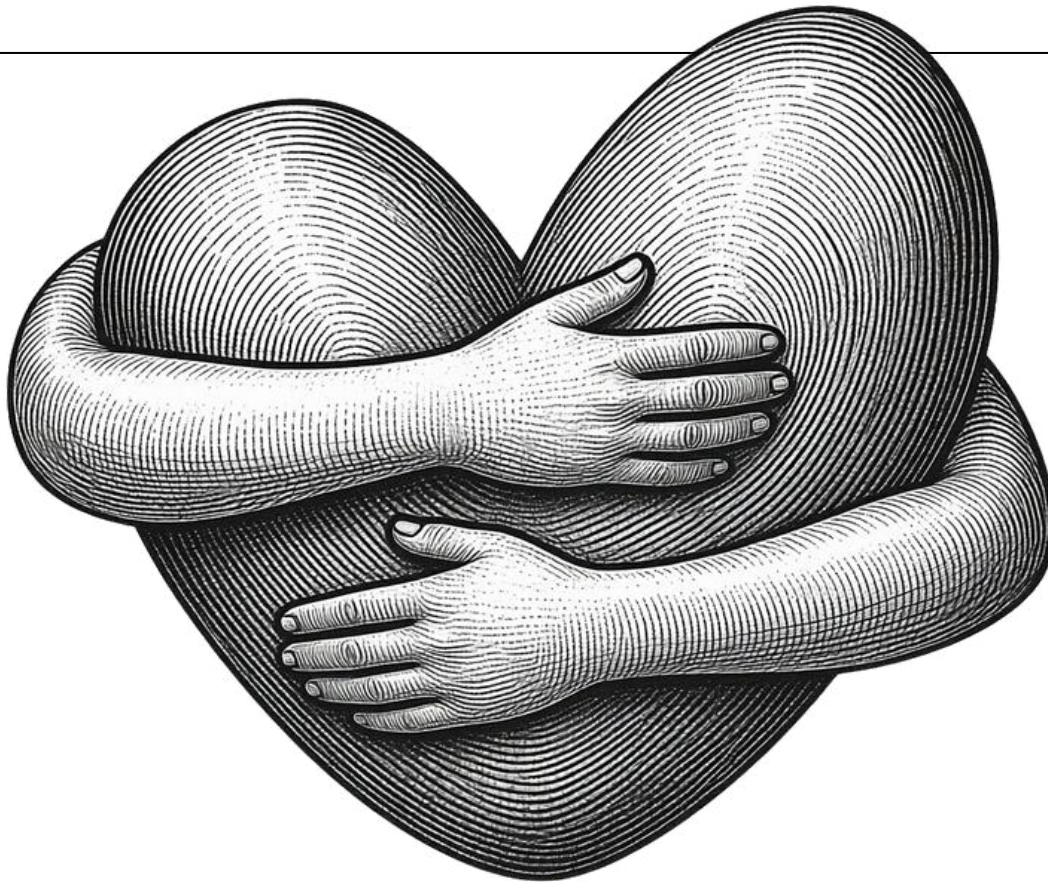
Daniel Harris

## **08 DATES TO REMEMBER**

Terra McMillan

# **DEI NEWSLETTER**

## How Stress Led to a Broken Heart (Syndrome)



FEBRUARY IS

## AMERICAN HEART MONTH

Many of us have heard stories about loved ones passing from a “broken heart.” What is less known is that broken heart syndrome is a survivable medical event called takotsubo cardiomyopathy, also known as stress cardiomyopathy.

Surprisingly, you do not need to experience heartbreak for your heart to “break”—severe stress alone can trigger this condition.

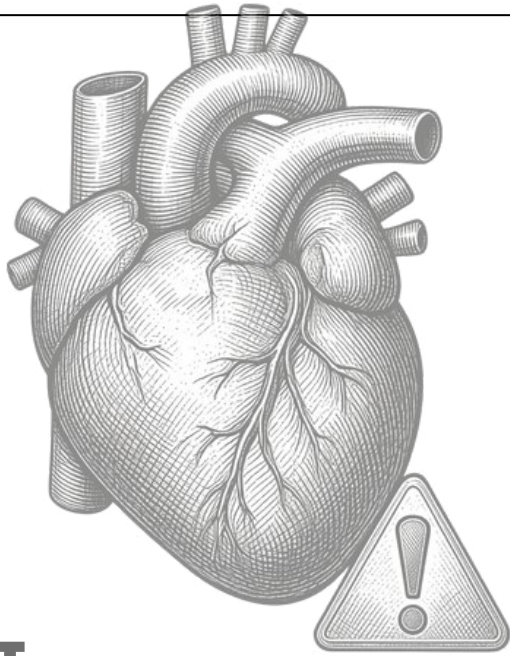
I learned this firsthand when my mom was diagnosed with takotsubo,

seemingly out of the blue. While recovering from two knee replacements, she tried to maintain her active lifestyle, continuing to volunteer at her church, babysitting toddlers, and running her house - in other words, doing too much for

---

# How Stress Led to a Broken Heart (Syndrome)

---



## UNDERSTANDING HEART ATTACKS VS. TAKOTSUBO

everyone. When she and my dad returned from an action-packed trip to Northern California, the cumulative stress caught up with her, leading to a literal “broken heart.”

Understanding Heart Attacks vs. Takotsubo: Through my mom’s week-long “vacation” in the hospital, I discovered the difference between typical heart attacks and takotsubo. A traditional heart attack is usually caused by cholesterol plaque blocking arteries, and risk factors like smoking, diet, and genetics.

**T**akotsubo, however, is triggered by surging stress hormones (cortisol) that “stun” the heart muscle, preventing the left ventricle from contracting properly—even when there is no blockage. Many people associate broken heart syndrome with major emotional events, like the loss of a loved one, but happy stressors (like winning the lottery) and even physical stressors, like my mom’s back-to-back knee surgeries, can trigger takotsubo.

---

## SYMPTOMS

### WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Symptoms of both conditions can be similar, but women often experience them differently than men. In movies, heart attacks are often depicted as sudden, severe chest pain and grabbing the left arm—usually by men. Symptoms for women are often mistaken for less serious issues like acid reflux or the flu. This can delay critical treatment. My mom felt extremely fatigued for weeks, then developed sudden nausea and severe abdominal and jaw pain. She never suspected her heart was the cause.

It is vital to recognize symptoms and seek medical help promptly. According to [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org), watch for:

- Uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain in the center of your chest (lasting more than a few minutes or coming and going)
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort
- Other signs: cold sweat, nausea, lightheadedness

#### Who Is at Risk?

Heart disease is the highest cause of death in both men and women. In the instance of a “traditional” heart attack, men make up 70% of the cases and the average age was 65, while the average age for women was 72. In contrast, more than 90% of takotsubo cases occur in women between ages 58 and 75.

#### Prevention and Awareness

In the “2025 Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update Fact Sheet”, the American Heart Association refers to the “Life’s Essential 8” as critical measures for improving cardiovascular health. They include not-smoking, physical activity,

---

# How Stress Led to a Broken Heart (Syndrome)

---

healthy diet, healthy body weight, sleep health, controlled cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar.

According to the Cleveland clinic, many of these “Essential 8” are negatively impacted by stress including sleep health, slowed metabolism, increased blood pressure, and the unhealthy choices people can make to cope with their stress, like smoking, drinking and substance abuse.

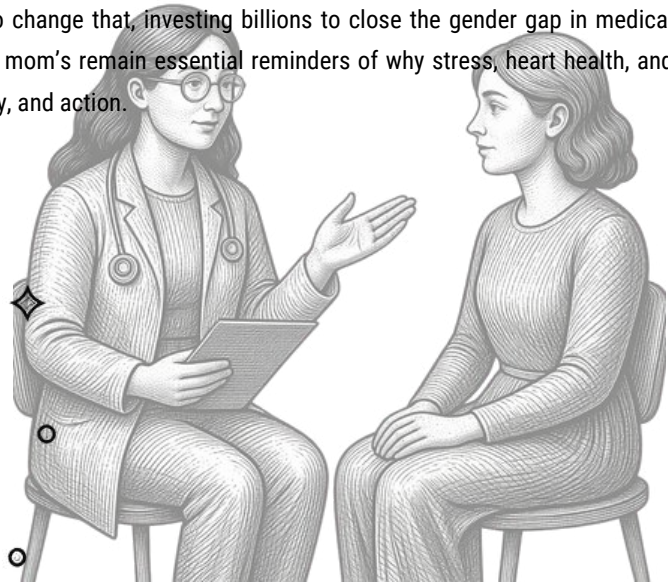
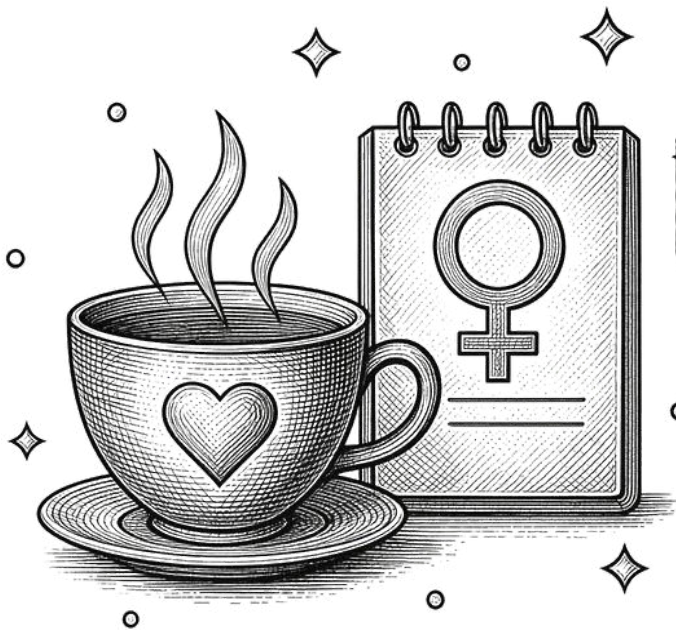
## Managing Stress

Regardless of age or risk, stress damages our bodies. Identify and find the healthy ways that work for you to manage your stress and avoid building a lifestyle that leads to being part of the statistics.

I often think about my mom’s broken heart (and how grateful I am that she has recovered), usually when I find my stress catching up to me in the form of some chest pressure. As accountants, many of us may be wired for achievement, responsibility, and a packed schedule, but we all have limits. Recognizing and maintaining boundaries between healthy and unhealthy stress is one of the best ways to avoid a heart event. There are many moments in my day to day when I catch myself realizing that I am turning into my mother. I think we would both agree that this is one way in which I can learn from her, so as not to not be like her.

## Women and Healthcare Research

While my mom’s story is deeply personal, it also reflects a broader truth: women’s health—especially conditions like takotsubo cardiomyopathy—has long been under-researched and underfunded. In fact, according to a 2021 analysis by McKinsey & Company, only about 1% of healthcare research and innovation funding is invested in female-specific conditions beyond oncology ([Gates Foundation](#)). Leaders like Melinda French Gates are working to change that, investing billions to close the gender gap in medical research. But until systemic change takes hold, stories like my mom’s remain essential reminders of why stress, heart health, and women’s unique medical needs deserve more attention, empathy, and action.



## SOURCES

- [American Heart Association - 2025 Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Update Fact Sheet](#)
- [American Heart Association - Heart Attack Symptoms in Women](#)
- [Harvard Health Publishing - Broken-heart syndrom \(takotsubo cardiomyopathy\).](#)
- [Cleveland Clinic - Understanding the Connection Between Stress and Heart Disease](#)
- [Women's Health - A Mysterious Heart Syndrome Targets Post-Menopausal Women](#)
- [Gates Foundation](#)

---

---

# BREAKING NEWS

---

---



DANIEL HARRIS



---

---

# THE BENEFITS OF COUNSELING

---

---

Almost everyone reading this has heard about Hungerford's Employee Assistance Program and Pine Rest Christian Health Services, but you may have only a vague sense of what it actually can do. Perhaps you have never needed counseling before and thought it was only for people with really severe issues like addictions or suicidal thoughts. Maybe you wondered if anyone from our company ever actually utilized this program. Well, now I am happy to say from first-hand experience that people do use this and do definitely benefit from it.

**HERE  
IS  
MY  
STORY.**



---

---

# BENEFITS OF COUNSELING CONT.

---

Beginning in November 2024 I began having episodes of painful gastrointestinal issues (I'll spare everyone the gory details). For a while I shrugged it off as bad reactions to certain foods, but after many incidences, I couldn't discern anything specific in my diet that seemed to be a cause. Then when tax season 2025 hit, I pushed this issue to the backburner so I could focus on my job. That didn't help the problem though; it's just procrastination.

In late April, I went to UM Health-West for a general physical that involved many things including a thorough discussion of the pain/discomfort I was having. I told my doctor I was pretty sure the issue must be in my intestines because issues typically happened in the evening hours after last eating food so figured there weren't any problems with my stomach or initial reactions to swallowing food. Beyond that, I wasn't sure of anything. This resulted in a lot of different tests being run to rule out various causes. Allergy tests results all came back negative. Mineral levels were all within normal ranges. I didn't have Celiac's disease or anything similar. Nothing obvious jumped out as an immediate source of my issues. The only other concern they found was borderline high cholesterol, which I have since been working on lowering on by cutting out red meat (I guess the term for me now is "pollo-pescatarian").

Based on these results, my general physician said he was immediately referring me for an early colonoscopy. In recent years, standard medical advice has been for most people to get their first colonoscopy beginning at age 45. Unfortunately, I was only 42 years old at that time. Many medical professionals are reluctant to approve such a procedure for patients at earlier ages unless someone has a severe condition that would warrant doing it sooner. Despite my general physician's initial recommendation, further review of the physical results lead to them only allowing for a colonoscopy after a full visit with a GI specialist. The earliest I was able to schedule this visit was a full 6 weeks after my general physical and then the resulting colonoscopy, if even approved, would likely be another 6 plus weeks after that.

This was when things turned worse for me mentally. Anxiety and distress can hit humans at unexpected times and in unexpected ways even if they have no prior history. Despite having cardiac issues my entire life and needing open heart surgery in my mid-thirties, medical issues had never been a source of mental health trouble for me before and I never considered talking to a therapist for any reason. This time, it was different. Almost immediately upon receiving the news that it would be a long while before I could get additional medical treatment, my brain began agonizing over the situation. Since lots of less serious things were ruled out, could this be cancer? What was I supposed to do with myself over the next 6-12 weeks? It wasn't just mental worries though. My appetite and usual enjoyment of food declined. The worst part was the resulting daily insomnia. In the early hours of every morning, I would wake after at best 3 hours of sleep and then toss and turn for hours trying in vain to get back to sleep. It was no exaggeration to say that every day for many weeks I never slept more than 3 hours. Supplements like magnesium and melatonin did not provide much help with this. While I would show up to work and be functional for 8 hours, I didn't accomplish much or enjoy anything else during this time of my life.

---

---

# BENEFITS OF COUNSELING CONT.

---

Most of the time I declined fun evening and weekend activities due to low energy levels even though I had plenty of time for them.

Dealing with all this eventually forced me to ask for professional help. No one I knew ever admitted to going to a therapist or counselor, so I didn't have any confidants to ask about this. Luckily, the Employee Assistance Center/Pine Rest program we have provides a helpful phone number to call and set up an initial consultation. I was referred to a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), Hannah Rice, and we had our first meeting together only a few days after I made the initial call. Virtual visits are offered, but personally, I preferred scheduling time to see her in person at her office. Pine Rest has many locations in western Michigan by the way. One visit can go up to an hour, but I never needed that much time.

Our weekly sessions were mostly just talking together to address my anxieties and find ways to better address the negative symptoms I was experiencing. The fact that she was a trained professional who had no prior history with me made it much easier for me to be fully honest with her and even frankly address past traumas like my father's suicide in a way I couldn't with family or friends. Counselors and therapists have ethical and legal obligations to keep what you say confidential. Plus, they offer a neutral outside perspective without any existing emotional attachment. The sessions provided focused, uninterrupted attention without any distractions. Her office was cozy, simple, and dark, without anything that would provide excess stimulation. Besides talking through my issues, we worked on slow breathing exercises together, which helped me relax more.

While the counseling sessions were going on and gradually helping me to sleep more, I did eventually have a visit with a gastroenterologist, who approved the colonoscopy. Knowing that the procedure would soon be coming eased my anxiety significantly. At the same time, I received a prescription for a daily drug called dicyclomine to help with my GI problems. I also started taking morning fiber supplements to improve digestive health. The colonoscopy itself couldn't be described as fun, but it wasn't as unpleasant as I have heard others describe it. I was asleep the entire time, and I awoke without any discomfort. Soon afterwards, they noted that there were some pre-cancerous polyps they removed during the procedure, but it turned out there was no cancer or other diseases/conditions noted. Taking the prescription medication and supplements did contribute to a large reduction in GI incidents although they haven't been completely eliminated.

About a week after that I returned to Hannah for one more counseling visit, but it was clear things had turned a corner for me, and I could go back to a normal life without ongoing help. Looking back on it at, my experience wasn't one of the most serious cases, but I still benefited from the care of a licensed counselor. That is why I recommend most people consider trying this when they are going through a down period in life.

**You may be pleasantly surprised by how much of a difference it can make for you.**

---

---

# MARCH

- Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month
- Gender Equality Month
- Greek-American Heritage Month
- Irish-American Heritage Month
- National Women's History Month
- March 1 – Zero Discrimination Day
- March 2-3 – Purim begins as sundown (Jewish)
- March 3 – Magha Puja Day (Buddhist)
- March 4 – Holi (Hindu)
- March 8 – International Women's Day
- March 15 – International Day to Combat Islamophobia
- March 16 – Lailat al-Qadr (Islamic)
- March 17 – St. Patrick's Day
- March 19 – Chaitra Navratri begins (Hindu)
- March 20 – Ostara (Wicca/Paganism)
- March 20 – Eid-al-Fitr/End of Ramadan (Islamic)
- March 21 – Naw Ruz (Baha'i)
- March 21 – World's Down Syndrome Day
- March 25 – International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade
- March 27 – Chaitra Navratri ends (Hindu)
- March 29 – Palm Sunday
- March 31 – International Transgender Day of Visibility
- March 31 – Mahavir Jayanti (Jain)

# APRIL

- Arab-American Heritage Month
- Autism Awareness Month
- Celebrate Diversity Month
- National Volunteer Month
- April 1-9 – Passover (Jewish)
- April 2 – Jehovah's Witnesses: Memorial of Jesus' Death
- April 2 – World Autism Awareness Day
- April 2 – Theravada New Year (Buddhist)
- April 2 – Great and Holy Thursday (Orthodox Christian)
- April 2 – Maundy Thursday (Protestant)
- April 2 – Holy Thursday (Roman Catholic)
- April 3 – Good Friday, Great and Holy Friday (Christian, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian)
- April 4 – Holy Saturday/Easter Vigil (Christian, Protestant, Roman Catholic)
- April 5 – Easter Sunday (Christian)
- April 10 – National Day of Silence (LGBTQ+)
- April 12 – Orthodox Easter/Pascha (Orthodox Christian)
- April 13 Vaisakhi (Sikh)
- April 13 – Yom HaShoah – Holocaust Remembrance Day - begins at sunset (Jewish)
- April 20 – Start of Ridvan (Baha'i)
- April 30 – Beltane begins at sunset (Wicca/Paganism)

# MAY

- Haitian Heritage Month
- Indian Heritage Month
- Jewish-American Heritage Month
- Mental Health Awareness Month
- National Asian American and South Pacific Islander Heritage Month
- Older Americans Month
- May 1 – Visakha Puja Day (Buddhism)
- May 1 – Beltane (Wicca/Paganism)
- May 5 – Samhain (Wicca/Paganism)
- May 5 – Cinco de Mayo
- May 17 – International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia
- May 21 – World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development
- May 21 – Global Accessibility Awareness Day
- May 21-23 – Shavuot (Jewish)
- May 22 – Harvey Milk Day
- May 23 – Declaration of the Bab (Baha'i)
- May 24 – Pentecost (Orthodox Christian)
- May 25 – Memorial Day
- May 26 – Eid al-Adha (Islamic)

