



Dr. Steve Sinatra: I'm Dr. Steve Sinatra, and on this **Wellness Wisdom** episode, I want to talk about stress cardiomyopathy.

Heartbreak and Heart Disease is one of my books, I wrote it, actually, in my early 40s. I did a 10-year psychotherapy training program, I was a board-certified cardiologist. Unfortunately, I was seeing a lot of sudden cardiac death. I was seeing arrhythmias, acute heart attacks — and I noticed an association. For example, after bereavement, the loss of a loved one or the loss of economic stability, and the list goes on and on...I would see these acute cardiac cases. It was just absolutely amazing.

And I'll never forget it...when I was a young cardiologist, when the Vietnam War was winding down, I saw a lot of sudden death. I was working in the cardiac catheterization lab, and I couldn't believe the amount of young people I was doing angiograms on. And it just had a terrific impact on me, where I was looking at stress as a clinical situation that affected the heart — and it could affect the heart, big time.

Now, a few years later, Japanese researchers looked at this, and they called it Takotsubo cardiomyopathy, or again, stress-induced cardiomyopathy. And what happens is, these people who are under intense emotional stress can develop a heart attack in about 5-10% of cases. Usually the pathology is a ballooning of, what we call, the left ventricle. And they can see this on angiographic analysis.

And the precipitating causes are usually overwhelming emotion. It could be fits of grief, of bereavement, even rage, or severe emotionality. So basically, the symptoms of this illness is just like a heart attack — they'd be getting acute chest pain, or shortness of breath, people can have arrhythmias. And basically the prognosis, unlike a heart attack, is good. In other words, a lot of these patients do recover.

My tip of the day on this is that if you lose a close one, especially during COVID-19, or you have somebody very close to you who is severely ill, just try to breathe, cry, have your emotions, don't hold anything in. And the best thing you can do, in my opinion as a psychotherapist and as a board-certified cardiologist, is when you're under severe emotional stress, you have this impending situation of doom, you feel like you're trapped, you can't get out of it, you could be losing a loved one — try to let down in your feelings, cry, cry, allow the tears to come out. If you can release the heartbreak through your tears, where it doesn't cause acute heart disease, that's my tip of the day. Surrender to your feelings, have your emotionality out, and hopefully you'll get through this crisis where it doesn't cause an acute cardiac event.



Dr. Steve Sinatra: Thanks for listening, folks. From my heart to yours, I'm Dr. Steve Sinatra.