

# **COPING WITH YOUR HEART CONDITION**

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# Outline of Presentation

## Psychosocial Aspects of Adult Congenital Heart Disease (ACHD)

- Model of biopsychosocial health
- Psychological concerns among ACHD
- Related factors

## Smart Heart Thinking

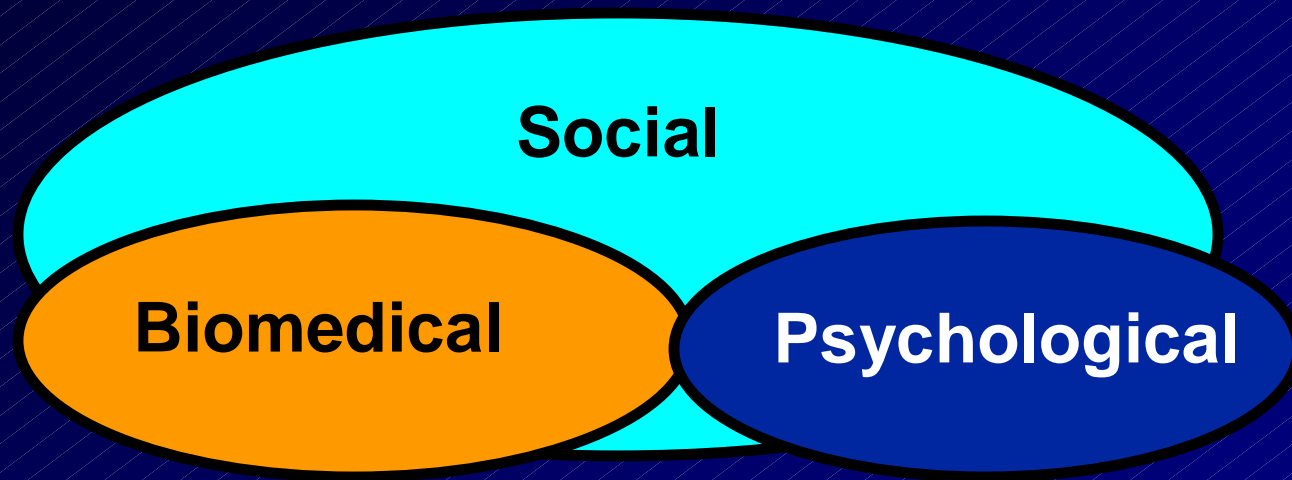
- Defining hypervigilance
- Why reduce hypervigilance?
- Strategies to reduce hypervigilance



# PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF ACHD



# Model of Biopsychosocial Health



*Focus on living full life rather than  
exclusive focus on heart*



# Psychological Concerns Among ACHD

## Question:

Are ACHD more likely to have psychological concerns than their peers?

## Answer:

Perhaps/Probably



# Psychological Concerns Among ACHD

- ACHD are more likely to report psychological symptoms than their peers
- When interviewed, 35 – 79% of ACHD received diagnoses of mood and/or anxiety disorders, but none had received any mental health treatment
- Toronto study: approximately 20% met criteria for current mood or anxiety disorder



*There is under-identification of psychological concerns and under-treatment within this group*

# Related Factors

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

- Body image
- “Hypervigilance”

## SOCIAL FACTORS

- Family roles, peer interactions
- Transition

## HEALTH-RELATED QUALITY OF LIFE

- Ongoing treatment demands
- Pregnancy concerns
- Physical activity limitations



# SMART HEART THINKING



# Defining Hypervigilance

## Hypervigilance = Hyper + Vigilance

What do these words mean on their own and together?

- Refers to an exaggerated attention to bodily sensations (e.g., heartbeats, pain)
- **GOALS:** Increase awareness of hypervigilance and develop strategies to manage it



# Hypervigilance in Cardiac Patients

- Common in medical patients
- Disease is an “ambush” prompting increased attention to health “enemies”
- Paying attention to your heart activity can give you an “illusion of control”



*Cardiac problems can trick you into thinking about your heartbeat*

# Why Reduce Hypervigilance: Three A's

- Accuracy
- Attention
- Avoidance



# Why Reduce Hypervigilance: **Accuracy**

- There are a lot of things we want to predict, but can't
- Highly sensitive detectors are less likely to describe their heartbeat as intense or disturbing  
**Message:** Greater discomfort does not mean greater accuracy
- There is the risk of alarmism



# Why Reduce Hypervigilance: **Attention**

- If you focus *too much* attention on your heartbeats, it means you pay less attention to other (more important?) things
- Focusing *too much* attention on your heartbeats is misplaced effort to improve health
- Attention is a choice



# Why Reduce Hypervigilance: **Avoidance**

- People sometimes avoid situations in which their heart rate is likely to rise
- This reinforces avoidant behaviour
- By avoiding situations, you're more likely to **INCREASE** your anxiety



# Strategy: **Distraction**

- If you reduce the amount of time that you pay attention to bodily signs, you'll likely notice a reduction in anxiety
- Shift attention to another interest and away from unnecessary focus on threats
- Purposeful and proactive (e.g., the anxious flyer takes reading material on an airplane)



# Strategy: Relaxation



- What relaxes you?
  - Deep breathing
  - Listening to relaxing music
  - Meditation
- Is there a “portable” technique that you can use anywhere and anytime?



# Strategy: Partner with Members of Your Medical Team

- You are the only person who can describe your symptoms to members of your medical team
- Discuss changes in symptoms and specific guidelines for physical activity
- Talk with you physician or nurse if you are concerned about your anxiety



# Conclusions

## Psychosocial Aspects

- Total health is worthy of your attention
- There is likely an under-detection and under-treatment of psychological concerns among ACHD

## Smart Heart Thinking

- Cardiac problems can trick you into thinking about your heart's activity
- Strategies can reduce hypervigilance

