



# MENTAL HEALTH AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

The high prevalence of cardiovascular disease among public safety professionals has become widely known. Perhaps less widely known is how intricately cardiovascular disease and mental health conditions are connected. First responders have an increased risk for both, so it's important to understand how they are related and what you can do to reduce the risk or manage symptoms if you've already been diagnosed.

The relationship between cardiovascular disease and mental health is **BIDIRECTIONAL**. Cardiovascular disease increases the risk of developing mental health symptoms, and experiencing mental health symptoms increases the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

## DEPRESSION

is associated with increased **inflammation**, which can contribute to the formation of **plaque and blood clots in arteries**.<sup>1</sup>

## ANXIETY

is associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease, including **coronary heart disease, stroke, and heart failure**.<sup>1</sup>

## TRAUMATIC STRESS

triggers the production of proteins, enzymes, and hormones that can **increase blood pressure** and cause **damage to the cardiovascular system**.<sup>2</sup>

Working in public safety comes with unique and often unavoidable risk factors, but every step you take to improve your physical health can simultaneously improve your mental health.



Create an exercise routine that fits your schedule and incorporates functional training. Consider movements like pushing, pulling, and lifting that directly translate to your job.



Eat a balanced diet of heart-healthy whole foods, including protein, fiber, fruits, and vegetables, and drink plenty of water.



Make time in your daily routine for activities like meditation, prayer, journaling, yoga, and deep breathing exercises to help manage stress.



Create a sleep routine and stick to it as much as possible. Keep your bedroom cool and dark and be mindful of caffeine and alcohol intake.



Quitting tobacco can be tough, but it is possible. Pick the strategy that works best for you and ask your friends and family to support your efforts.



Talk to your doctor about cardiac screenings. Ask how often you should be screened, based on your individual and occupational risk factors.

For additional wellness resources and strategies, and to learn more about mental health, visit:  
**[nami.org/FrontlinePublicSafety](https://nami.org/FrontlinePublicSafety)**

Source information:

1. Levine GN, Cohen BE, Commodore-Mensah Y, et al. Psychological health, well-being, and the mind-heart-body connection: A scientific statement from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2021;143(10):e763–e783. doi:10.1161/cir.0000000000000947
2. Arenson M, Cohen B. Posttraumatic stress disorder and cardiovascular disease. *PTSD Research Quarterly*. 2017;28(1). [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/publications/rq\\_docs/V28N1.pdf](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/publications/rq_docs/V28N1.pdf)

