



Cost of living, financial stress, and heart health

Health experts have raised concerns about the growing impact of cost-of-living stress and the link to heart health, highlighting an increased risk of heart attack, cardiovascular disease, and stroke. Stress, defined as a state of mental or emotional strain resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances, is often an under-recognised risk factor for heart health.

In today's fast-paced world, chronic stress has become normalised. Nicci Dent from Heart Research Australia aptly describes living under constant stress as "like leaving your car engine running all night." When the body experiences stress, it releases hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. Adrenaline accelerates the heart rate and raises blood pressure, and prolonged exposure to elevated levels can cause lasting damage to the heart.

Cortisol, another key stress hormone, not only increases blood pressure, but also elevates blood sugar, cholesterol, and triglyceride levels—factors that further contribute to cardiovascular risk.

The ongoing cost-of-living crisis has intensified these stressors for many Australians, with daily financial pressures taking a tangible toll on heart health. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, nearly half of Australians identify financial worries as the primary factor affecting their wellbeing, and 40 percent report feeling stressed on a weekly basis.

Stress manifests in various physical and emotional symptoms, including poor sleep quality, waking up feeling groggy, persistent tension, headaches, irritability, mental fog, difficulty relaxing, and restlessness at night. Recognising these signs is crucial; if you identify with any of these symptoms, it is important to take proactive steps to manage your stress.

Signs of stress



Irritability



Mental fog



Headaches



Difficulty relaxing



Poor sleep quality



Waking up feeling groggy



Persistent tension



Restlessness at night





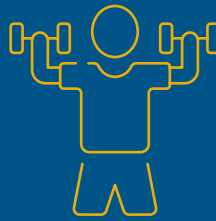
REDFEB Challenge

A great way to begin your stress management is the REDFEB Bingo challenge, which focuses on the 4Ms. These include meals, movement, measurement and mental wellness.

The bingo card encourages actions such as having a healthy meal, going for a walk, checking your blood pressure or slowing down to take a breath, all of which are aimed at helping to reduce your stress.

Participants select one or more activities (tiles) each day, aiming to complete the board by the end of the month to achieve "BINGO." This structured challenge encourages healthy habits that support stress reduction and heart health. (Scan the QR code to join the challenge.)

While the cost of living may be beyond individual control, how your body responds to and recovers from stress is something you can influence. Prioritising stress management is essential for protecting your heart and overall wellbeing.



Turkey and lentil kofta

Get organised and healthy with this easy to freeze and batch cook recipe from the Heart Foundation. Check out their website for more heart smart meal choices. Serves 8 | Prep 40 min | Freeze

Ingredients list

- ▶ 2x 420g cans of brown lentils
- ▶ 1 kg turkey mince
- ▶ 200g feta cheese, crumbled
- ▶ 1 tbspn dried oregano
- ▶ 1 tspn allspice, ground
- ▶ 3 cloves garlic, crushed

Method

- ▶ Combine all ingredients in a bowl, season with pepper. Shape tablespoons into koftas. Makes approximately 48.
- ▶ Arrange koftas in a freezer-proof container with baking paper between each layer. Label, date and seal then freeze for up-to two months.

Serving options

- ▶ Thaw desired amount of koftas in the fridge overnight, then cook in a frying pan with a little olive oil until evenly brown.
- ▶ There's plenty of serving options. They're delicious with a salad, inside a wrap or with a veggie tray bake. Think Mediterranean vegetables like eggplant, zucchini, capsicum, red onion and tomato. Make a dressing by combining Greek yoghurt, olive oil and red wine vinegar.



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