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Open, Full and Imperfect: What You Must Know About Your Heart

By Maya Talisman Frost

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Last Friday was National Wear Red Day, an intentional opportunity to wear a red dress as a symbol of awareness of the fact that heart disease is the number one killer of women in America.

I didn't wear a red dress, but I did get my very first electrocardiogram.

I wish I could say that I had planned it that way.

The truth is that I was experiencing chest pain, a terrible squeezing sensation in my left shoulder and left arm, and an alarming tingling running up my neck. I headed into Urgent Care. The next few days brought a series of tests involving all kinds of electrodes, ultrasounds, and my personal favorite, running on the treadmill. I'm still waiting for the results.

I'm a 43-year-old woman, fit and active, with low blood pressure, a stupendously healthy diet, and zero history of cardiac problems in my family. I've never smoked, I drink a small glass of wine most evenings, I have low cholesterol, and I've been meditating for over twenty years. You'd be hard pressed to find a woman with a lower degree of risk for any kind of heart disease. Yet, here I am, hanging out in the cardiologist's office with a bunch of 75-year-olds.

My doctor is my stepfather's cardiologist. I know he's good because he has done about a dozen surgeries and procedures to keep my stepfather alive and kicking over the last 20 years. Dr. Toren is a great guy. Still, I never quite imagined I would need to visit him myself.

It's been rather disconcerting, to say the least.

But it's also given me an opportunity to think about my heart in a whole new way. I am appreciating this fantastic organ and its ability to beat over a billion times in an average lifetime without (much) assistance.

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Like most healthy people, I've taken it for granted. I've allowed it to go about its work, and only in rare circumstances when it decided to pound—middle school crush walking past me, parachute not opening fully while skydiving, snatching children out of harm's way—did I ever really pay attention to it.

Poor heart. So unappreciated.

Not anymore. In the last few days, I have felt every beat of my heart. I note the blood coursing through my arteries with every pulse. Becoming hyperaware of my heart's magnificence has resulted in an indescribable sense of awe. I've been greatly humbled.

I'd always sort of figured that I was in control of my body. I've been certified as a personal fitness trainer, and I know a lot about how to change your shape or size or strength through exercise. I've been healthy enough to actually think that I was the one in charge. How ridiculous of me to believe that

my body will do exactly what I want it to. It's been running the show since before I was born.

Anyone suffering from any kind of illness, injury or decreased ability already knows this. I am guilty of ignoring my body on the most important level—recognizing its power over me. In my continuing effort to connect body, mind and spirit, I've forgotten that the three don't always share equal billing.

Empedocles, a philosopher and scientist who lived in Sicily in the 400s BC, was the first to state in any sort of medical way that the heart was the origin of human emotions. I guess we're supposed to believe, based on current research, that this is completely inaccurate. Our emotions are actually connected to our brains.

But really, it just isn't as satisfying to think of love as being a head thing. Our hearts seem more poetic, more romantic, more likely to be swept away by the sheer force of nature that is love. We understand what it means and how it feels to be brokenhearted. We feel an ache in our hearts in quite a literal way. A headache is nothing like a heartache.

We use a lot of language that calls attention to this link between our hearts and all that is good, true, beautiful, and just. Whether we're listening to our heart, opening our heart, connecting to our heart, trusting our heart, or simply living to our heart's content, we regard it as the seat of the soul and the source of tremendous compassion and tenderness.

Women are supposed to have a pretty good handle on all this, and that's why I believe that we haven't really considered women as being susceptible to heart disease. We're great at picking up on the importance of being aware of breast cancer, but when it comes to the heart, we want to believe that we are somehow protected from what we have come to think of as the stressed-out man's disease. Or the fat person's disease. Or the don't-pay-any-attention-to-your-health disease. We hope that by simply being aware of our emotions, our habits and their effect on our bodies that we're somehow immune.

I guess what I'm trying to say is this: if you have a heart, then you are at risk. It's that simple. It's terribly important to do all the right things, but even then, you've still got this ticker that needs tending. You need to know your risks, and you know to know how to reduce them.

I'm not sure what I'm going to learn about my heart when all is said and done, but I've already learned an extremely valuable lesson. My heart may be open, it may be full of love, but that doesn't mean it's perfect.

I'm hoping for some seriously good news for Valentine's Day this year. I'll be waiting, and wearing red.

Maya Talisman Frost is a mind masseuse. Her work has inspired thinkers in over 80 countries. She serves up a unique blend of clarity, comfort and comic relief in her free weekly ezine, the Friday Mind Massage. To subscribe, visit

The Four C's You Need To Know When Purchasing Your Diamond

By Sue Jan

If you are thinking of purchasing a diamond, you must check out the four criteria that diamonds are graded by, namely the color, cut, clarity and carat of the diamond.

A diamond with no color allows maximum light to pass through it, therefore this type of diamond is usually preferred for its sparkle. On the color grading scale, diamonds graded D, E, and F mean they have no color. G, H, and I diamonds have very little color. J, K, and L mean that the diamond is a slight yellow color. P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, and X diamonds have a darker shade of yellow. Diamonds graded Z has a color other than yellow or white and are the rarest and most expensive diamonds in the world. Generally, D-graded diamonds are the most valuable, and X the least.

The cut of the diamond refers to the shape it is cut into and also its reflective quality.

Diamonds are generally cut with 58 facets. The sparkle and brilliance of the diamond generally depends on its cut, its angles, its finish and its ability to reflect light. The most popular diamond cuts are heart, oval, marquise, princess, pear, trillion, round, and emerald. Common cutting problems include a diamond cut too thin that causes it to lose some of its sparkle, or a missing or off center culet.

The clarity refers to the diamond's internal and surface imperfections and blemishes. Diamonds that are clear are more brilliant; they are also quite rare and thus highly priced. These flawless diamonds have no internal or external imperfections or blemishes

The perfect diamond carries a grade of FL or IF, that is, Flawless or Internally Flawless. A diamond with a grade of I-1, I-2 or I-3 means that it is imperfect, with I-3 being the worst grade. VVS1 and VVS2 means that the diamond is very very slightly imperfect; VS1 and VS2 diamond is very slightly imperfect; and SI-1 and SI-2 means that the diamond is slightly imperfect.

The unit by which the weight of the diamond is measured by is called the carat. One carat is equal to 200 milligrams. A carat is divided into 100 segments called points, with 150 points equal to one and a half carats.

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When you purchase a diamond, you must purchase a diamond certificate also known as the Diamond Grading Report. This report is issued by the Gemological Institute of America otherwise known as GIA. With this diamond certificate, you can verify the diamond's color, cut, clarity and carat. You can buy a diamond with confidence from the diamond dealer as long as the certificate is GIA-issued and not from the dealer. Do not accept certificates from any other institute other than GIA, as GIA has been established as the most trustworthy and respectable.

For more tips on purchasing Diamonds, visit Susan's site at

and

. Susan also enjoys writing on a wide range of topics at

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