Pregnancy, the multi-tasking of raising young families with career development, the burden of caring for older parents are just a few examples of the life stages that can bring significant emotional and mental stressors that can contribute cardiovascular risk for women. Since women have longer life expectancies, they often are exposed to the loneliness and depression of living alone. “Combined with hormonal changes, these life stresses can create heart issues,” says Dr. Carissa Buenvenida, a cardiologist with Advocate Heart Institute.

“Eliminating mental stressors is not always an option. Mental and emotional stressors from family, relationships and work are present at all stages in life,” says Dr. Buenvenida. “Finding healthy coping mechanisms to deal with stress helps keeping inflammation down and helps women stay healthy.”

Dr. Buenvenida recommends the following:

Get active. Exercise regularly and keep an active lifestyle.

Cherish quiet time. Meditate. Do yoga. Take at 10-minute mental break.

Socialize with friends, family and people who bring you joy.

Eat Well. A well-balanced diet includes controlling salt and sugar content, adding in multigrain, high fiber foods and lowering saturated fats and high cholesterol foods. A clean and healthy diet often leads to us feeling good about ourselves both physically and mentally.

Hydrate with water. Avoid sugary and caffeinated beverages. Maintaining adequate fluid balance wards off some of the physical manifestations of stress.

Sleep. Make time to sleep and identify and treat any health issues that might be affecting sleep, such as sleep apnea.