

## SHELL SHOCKED

### How to Live with a Broken Heart

By Art Stevens

Many years ago I was sent to take an echocardiogram. The cardiologist called me several days later and said “My news isn’t good. The test indicates that you’re suffering from a broken heart.”

I was stunned. I’d never heard of such a physical ailment before. But yet I had heard of lovers dying of a broken heart. I thought that it was just a romantic expression.

I’d heard of blocked arteries, malfunctioning valves, rheumatic heart disease and angina as being severe heart ailments but never a broken heart. I said, “But, doctor, how does a broken heart even show up on an echocardiogram? What exactly does it look like?”

The cardiologist said, “We see symptoms of sadness and disappointment in the heart mass itself. These symptoms can lead to cracks in the heart muscle itself. If left untended there could be

even more cracks and the heart would literally break into many pieces. It's best to deal with the problem when the heart is only partially broken."

"Doctor, forgive me, but I've never heard of such a disease. Is this considered a rare sickness?" I asked.

"It's more common than most people think," he said. "Heart break can be literal – a heart actually breaking. The most typical causes are rejection, unrequited love or the end of a love affair. Do you fall into any of these categories?"

I sighed. "Sadly, yes. I just ended a two-year relationship with the girl of my dreams. I am literally heartbroken. Whoops, there I even said it myself."

"I thought so," said the wise cardiologist. "We'd better take steps now to avert further complications. The first thing I'd like you to do is expunge your system of the memory of your recent break up. I'm going to give you a prescription for 200 proof whiskey made in the backwoods of Tennessee. It can only be

imbibed by patients with broken hearts. I'd like you to take six shot glasses before you retire for the evening."

I thought about that. What an unusual prescription. I didn't think I needed one to visit my friendly bootlegger but I figured I'd do what the doctor orders.

The doctor continued. "And I will issue another prescription for you to visit a sex surrogate six times."

"Do I really need a prescription for that?" I asked.

"We work with specialists who understand the symptoms of a broken heart and are trained to have you focus on new experiences. This treatment is an absolute must for broken hearts."

Very strong medicine I thought. But the doc knows what he's doing. And then he said, "As part of this three-part treatment the final phase is to connect you with new people. The third prescription is for you to engage in social remediation through "Broken Hearts Anonymous." This is a social support organization where you will share your experiences with others who have developed this dread disease."

“Sounds good,” I said. “Doc, will this broken heart of mine go into remission with the passage of time?”

He paused for a moment, then said “I don’t want to give you false assurances that it can’t recur. Some men have experienced up to a half a dozen broken hearts during their life time. But medical science has achieved major breakthroughs in its treatment. It can be nipped in the bud so long as you continue to see me for periodic check ups. But the best way to avert a broken heart is to get yourself a new girl fiend and have a long and happy relationship with her.”

I thought about that. “Doc, this is my first broken heart. I suspect I’ll have more. That’s just who I am. I’ll do everything I can to avoid it. I’ll eat well, exercise and try to stay in love with just one person. I now recognize the dangers of a broken heart and will try to be careful. I don’t want to mess with my health. But how can you guarantee that I won’t get another broken heart sometime in the future?”

“There’s only one way,” the doctor said. “Remain a bachelor, get thee to a monastery, and never date another woman.”

I ended the visit with the cardiologist and thought long and hard about what he said all the way home. Never date another woman? That’s like asking Alex Rodriguez not to take any more performance enhancing drugs.

I sighed. No way can I change. I guess I just needed to prepare to enter the Guinness Book of Records with the most broken hearts in history.

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