

Depression & Physical Illness

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), more than 80 percent of people who receive the appropriate treatment for depression see improvement.

Living with a physical disease or illness can be considerably more difficult if you also have depression. Similarly, having depression can increase your risk for developing a chronic disease like diabetes or heart disease. Fortunately, most people who seek treatment for depression see results, which means they can manage their physical health conditions easier and/or help prevent a chronic illness from occurring.

Learning to recognize the symptoms of depression is the first step on the road to seeking treatment. According to NIMH, those symptoms include: a persistent sad/anxious mood; feelings of guilt; feelings of hopelessness; thoughts of death; insomnia or oversleeping; and appetite and/or weight fluctuations, among others.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, one in four people with cancer also suffer from depression. The NIMH says research has shown that having diabetes doubles the risk of depression; that 3 in 20 Americans with heart disease experience depression compared to the 1 in 20 average of people without heart disease; and that 10 to 27 percent of Americans who experience a first or recurring stroke each year suffer from depression.

In addition, the NIMH reports that depression and anxiety disorders may affect heart rhythms, increase

blood pressure, elevate insulin and cholesterol levels, and result in chronically elevated levels of stress hormones which divert the body's metabolism away from the kind of tissue repair needed in heart disease. People with depression may be more at risk of developing diabetes or heart disease.

And for those with a chronic health condition, having depression can significantly affect their ability to follow a treatment regimen provided by their doctor. Research shows that depressed people often have reduced physical and mental functioning which can make it more difficult for them to keep up on taking their medicines or exercising or following a specific diet. People who receive effective treatment of depression often see an improvement in their medical condition and in their quality of life.

All of this suggests that treating depression can be vital to your health. The exact form that treatment takes needs to be decided carefully with your health professional, particularly if you also have a chronic disease which you are managing at the same time. In most cases, depression can be effectively treated at the same time that you are seeking treatment for a physical illness like diabetes, heart disease, cancer, or stroke.

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