



MDwise

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Depression, Anxiety, and Physical Health Problems

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Topic Overview

It's not unusual for mental health problems, especially depression and anxiety, to occur with long-term (chronic) diseases. For example, you may:

- Have diabetes and also feel very sad.
- Be depressed and notice that your physical health is getting worse. Perhaps your blood pressure is going up.
- Have asthma, feel very anxious, and sometimes have panic attacks.

Depression

People who have chronic diseases such as arthritis, asthma, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, hepatitis C, and stroke often also have depression. Depression also often occurs with chronic pain. Depression may occur with these problems because:

- The everyday stress of dealing with a chronic disease causes the depression or makes it worse.
- People who have depression often find it hard to take care of their health, which can lead to health problems.¹
- People who have depression tend to eat poorly, get less exercise, and smoke.
- Some chronic diseases change your body chemistry and help cause depression. Cushing's syndrome and an underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism) are examples of this.
- Depression is linked with some chronic diseases. For example, depression makes coronary artery disease (CAD) and death from heart disease more likely.¹ Also, people with diabetes are more likely to get depression and people with depression are more likely to develop diabetes.²

If you treat depression, it can improve your health and quality of life.

Here are some things you can do to help yourself.

- Know the symptoms of depression so that you can get treatment. Talk to your doctor, or take this short quiz to check your symptoms.

- Ask your doctors about the medicines you're taking. Some medicines may cause depression, and medicines you take for depression may make other health problems worse.
- Read all about depression.

Here are tools to help a friend or family member who may be depressed:

- Depression: Helping Someone Get Treatment
- Depression: Supporting Someone Who Is Depressed

Anxiety

Anxiety and health problems also are linked. You may feel anxious because you have a health problem. And anxiety can make a health problem worse. For example, older men who have an anxiety disorder are more likely to have a heart attack.³

To help yourself:

- Know the symptoms of anxiety, such as feeling that you can't relax. If you often feel anxious, talk with your doctor or a counselor.
- Reduce anxiety by getting regular exercise, doing relaxation techniques, and lowering stress in your life. See the topics Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Panic Attacks and Panic Disorders.

For anxiety and depression, you can:

- Work closely with all your doctors and tell them about all your health problems. Your family and other medical doctors need to know you are depressed, and any counselor you talk to needs to know about your physical health problems.
- Join a support group for depression, anxiety, or the chronic disease you have. You can find support in seminars and groups led by professionals, in groups of others who have the same condition, and in your relationships with family and friends.
- Eat a balanced diet, and get regular exercise.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs. They can make depression and anxiety worse.

Many people have concerns about seeking treatment for a mental health problem. You may think it's a sign of weakness, or you don't want people to know about it. It's important to overcome these reasons for not seeking treatment. **Treating depression or anxiety is good for your health.**

Credits

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