

Depression & Heart Disease

IT'S A COMMON COMBINATION



What Is Depression?

Feeling blue from time to time is normal.

Usually, times of sadness pass and treatment is not needed. Depression is more than feeling blue. It is a serious medical condition that can affect your mood and thinking. It also affects how you feel about yourself, your relationships and your daily routine. For some people, depression can lead to suicide.



Some common signs of depression are:

- Constantly feeling sad or empty.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed.
- Weight gain or weight loss that is not due to dieting.
- Slowed movement or feeling restless.
- Too much or too little sleep.
- Loss of energy or fatigue.
- Feeling worthless or guilty much of the time.
- Unable to concentrate, remember things or make decisions.
- Constant thoughts of death or suicide.



Did You Know...

- Depression affects over 19 million people every year.¹
- Approximately 1 million Americans suffer a heart attack every year.²
- Depression is common among people with heart disease.
- Depression, left untreated, can make it more difficult to recover from heart disease.
- Depression can be treated.

Treatment Is Available

The most common treatments for depression are:

- **Psychotherapy.** This involves talking with a mental health professional (therapist) about ways to better cope with changes in your life. Research has shown that it is effective for depression and that most people see progress in a timely manner.
- **Antidepressant medication.** Medicine can help correct an imbalance in the brain chemicals that control a person's mood. Most medicine can be used safely but should be prescribed by a doctor who knows about the drug and how it might affect other medicine you may be taking. Be sure to tell all of your doctors about all of your medical conditions and all of the medication that you're taking. Most people will see signs of relief within four to six weeks.
- **A combination of the two.** This approach combines "talk therapy" with antidepressant medication and can be more effective for some people than either medicine or psychotherapy alone.

Other treatments are available and can be described by your health care provider.

What Is the Link between Depression and Heart Disease?

Depression and heart disease are common. Research has shown many links between heart disease and depression. Depressed people are more likely to develop heart disease and people with heart disease are more likely to become depressed. In fact, of the thousands of people who survive a heart attack, about one in three experience major depression.¹

The reasons for this are unclear, but researchers have developed strong theories. Depressed people are more likely to smoke cigarettes and this adds to the

¹ National Institute of Mental Health

² Retrieved from www.focusonheart.com

³ National Institute of Mental Health

development of heart disease. Some scientists believe that depression affects the body in physical ways that worsen the heart disease.

Also, heart attack victims are often concerned with the serious physical side effects of their condition, and may even think more about death. For these people, feelings of sadness may give way to depression.

Whatever its link with heart disease, depression is a serious medical condition that needs care. The risk of repeat heart attacks and constant illness is twice as high in people with heart disease and depression. The good news is that depression is treatable, especially if detected early.

How Do I Know If I'm Depressed?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- During the past month, have I constantly been feeling down, depressed or hopeless?
- During the past month, have I constantly had little interest or pleasure in doing things?

If you answered "yes" to either of the questions, you may be depressed. Contact your health care professional for a thorough evaluation.

How Do I Seek Help and Get the Right Treatment?

Follow these five steps:

1. **Make a list.** Write down any signs of depression that you are having, along with your questions about depression and its treatment.
2. **Talk with a health care provider.** Arrange a visit with your doctor or a mental health professional. Share your list of signs and questions about depression and its treatment. Review any medications you may be taking.
3. **Select the right treatment.** Ask your health care provider to describe the risks and benefits of all types of treatment. Also ask him or her to recommend the type of treatment that is most likely to help in your case.
4. **Learn more about depression.** Your provider or local mental health association can suggest reading materials

on depression and advise you of local support groups. You can get information from the **National Mental Health Association** at 1-800-969-NMHA (6642) or www.nmha.org

5. **Update your provider about your progress.** Once you are in treatment, make sure that your provider knows if you are feeling better or worse. Ask questions about your progress. Do not stop taking any medicine when you start to feel better. Never stop taking medicine without first talking with your provider.

Depression can be treated. It should be given the same attention and care that all other serious medical conditions are given. Taking care of yourself includes quickly and effectively dealing with both depression and heart disease.

Getting Help

If you have heart disease and think that you may be suffering from depression, call your health care provider or your program's toll-free number.

**GET HELP RIGHT AWAY IF YOU
ARE THINKING OF HURTING
YOURSELF OR OTHERS**



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