Depression & Heart Disease

The Link between Depression and Heart Disease
Research has shown many links between heart disease and depression. It is common for someone to feel sad and depressed after experiencing a heart attack, cardiac surgery or a procedure, recent hospitalization, or a new diagnosis of heart disease.

The feelings of sadness should eventually go away after a few weeks, usually after a normal routine is re-established. Ongoing feelings of sadness that lasts for an extended period of time can be a sign of depression.

Researchers are unsure about the exact link between heart disease and depression. They do know that some symptoms of depression may reduce overall physical and mental health, increasing the risk for heart disease or making symptoms of heart disease worse. Depression has also been known to cause people to ignore their medication plan and avoid treatment for heart disease.¹

What is certain is that 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.

What Is Depression?
Depression is a serious medical condition that can affect a person’s emotional and physical health and causes a constant feeling of sadness and loss of interest. Depression can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems. Some people with depression may have trouble doing normal day-to-day activities. Others with depression may feel as if their life isn’t worth living. Depression is a chronic illness that usually requires long-term treatment.

Some common signs of depression are:
- Regularly feeling sad or empty.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed.
- Weight gain or weight loss that is not due to dieting.
- 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.

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 life changes. Research has shown that it is an effective treatment for depression and that most people see progress in a timely manner.
Antidepressant medication - Medicine can help correct an imbalance in brain chemicals that control a person’s mood. Medicine should be prescribed by a doctor who knows how it might react with any other medicines the patient may be 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 than either medicine or psychotherapy alone.

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

Seeking Help and Getting the Right Treatment

Depression can be treated. It should be given the same attention and care that all other serious medical conditions are given. If you are seeking help for treating depression, start with these five steps:

Make a list. Write down any signs of depression that you are having, along with your questions about depression and its treatment.

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.

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.

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 Mental Health America at 1-800-969-6642 or www.mentalhealthamerica.net

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.

This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Health Provider Group does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here.
