



Depression and chronic illness

Depression is more than just sadness; it can change your view of the world making you feel hopeless and alone. It can cause you to lose interest in daily activities that used to bring you joy. Depression can also make other medical conditions worse.

What are some symptoms of depression?

Depression can have both physical and emotional symptoms. Physical symptoms include:

- Exhaustion and fatigue (feeling tired all the time)
- Stomach/digestive problems
- Sleep problems
- Chronic pain that gets worse
- Changes in appetite or weight

Emotional symptoms include:

- Constant feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and/or worthlessness
- Loss of interest in the activities you used to enjoy
- Feelings of guilt
- Irritability or anxiety
- Having a hard time concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions

What is the connection between depression and chronic illness?

Chronic illness is any health condition that lasts for a long time. People with chronic illnesses need to adjust to the demands of their illness and its treatments. Chronic illnesses often demand changes in lifestyle and can affect your ability to move around and have independence. These changes may make it harder to do the things you enjoy and can affect your self-confidence.

The worse your chronic illness is, the more likely it is that you will have depression symptoms. You are more likely to have depression if your chronic illness causes pain, disability, or makes it hard to do things with other people. Depression can also make the chronic illness worse by increasing pain and fatigue.

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You are not alone

Depression is one of the most common problems related to chronic illness. The warning signs of depression are often not noticed because people think feeling depressed is a normal part of dealing with a chronic illness. It is not. Tell your health care provider if you think you may be depressed.

Getting help

It is important to treat both the chronic illness and the depression. Treatment of the chronic illness can help improve the symptoms of depression. And treating depression may also help the chronic illness improve. Depression treatment may include psychotherapy (counseling), medication, or a combination of both.

If you are depressed, getting help can improve your medical condition and give you a better quality of life. You are also more likely to stay with a treatment plan to help your chronic illness.

What can I do to help myself when I'm feeling depressed?

- Get support from health care providers you trust and can talk openly with.
- Spend time with trusted friends and family members.
- Learn as much as you can about your condition.
- Set goals for yourself. Expect your mood to improve slowly, not right away.
- Take time for fun and relaxation.
- Get regular physical activity.
- Do hobbies and activities you enjoy.

If you have symptoms of depression, talk with your health care provider about what you can do to feel better.