

Wellness by the Month

Depression and Chronic Disease

It is normal for a person to have a brief period of shock or disbelief after being diagnosed with a major life-threatening illness. In addition, some medical illnesses can actually cause you to feel “blue” or sad. However, when that sadness or disbelief lasts for a long time, it may not be the physical illness that’s causing the bad mood. It may be depression. Depression commonly occurs with chronic conditions, but it is usually not noticed or treated.

Why does it happen?

There are various reasons that depression and medical illness can occur together. Some medical conditions, such as an under active thyroid or Cushing’s disease, may biologically contribute to depression. Some people who suffer from chronic conditions may become depressed in dealing with the prognosis, pain, and incapacity caused by the illness or its treatment. Certain medications have been linked to depression and may further enhance symptoms of depression, so it is important to let your physician(s) know about any and all medications and or herbal supplements you are taking. Other times, the depression and chronic illness may be unrelated.

What are the Symptoms?

Since depression and certain medical illnesses share some of the same symptoms, it is easy to get them confused. For example, symptoms of depression such as weight loss, sleeping problems, and low energy may occur in some chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, or stroke. Other symptoms of depression, such as loss of interest or memory, can also be early warning signs of Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s disease.

Additional symptoms of depression include:

- **Constant sad mood**
- **Feelings of worthlessness, guilt, or hopelessness**
- **Thoughts of death or suicide**
- **Excessive crying**

What can be done?

With the proper treatment, the symptoms of depression can be eased in up to 80% of cases. Treatment of the depression can also have a positive impact on the medical illness, because there will be an improved quality of life. If you or a loved one have a chronic condition and have symptoms of depression, call **HAP’s Coordinated Behavioral Health Management Department (CBHM) at 1-800-444-5755**. CBHM services are confidential.

Emergency help is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you or a loved one is thinking of suicide, get help at the nearest emergency room.