

MENTAL HEALTH AND CHRONIC MEDICAL CONDITIONS



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How do your mental health and chronic medical conditions affect each other?

For some, managing a chronic health condition can lead to mental stress, strain, and even cause anxiety and depression. This is very common, and you should not feel badly for experiencing these symptoms. There are resources and treatments available to help you better manage these symptoms. It is important to address your anxiety or depression because declining mental health can make it difficult to manage your physical health as well.

For example, the American Diabetes Association reports that people with diabetes who deal with depression tend to show poorer blood sugar control, decreased physical activity, higher obesity, and potentially more diabetes end-organ complications or impaired function (example: kidney failure).

While occasional sadness is normal, if you experience sadness lasting more than a few weeks, you may have depression. Some symptoms include (but are not limited to):

- Feeling hopeless or anxious
- Feeling worthless or helpless
- Losing interest in activities that usually bring pleasure
- Difficulty focusing or remembering things
- Changes in sleep or appetite Irritability

For those who struggle with mental health issues, managing a disease or chronic condition can be very difficult. According to RTI Health Solutions, studies have shown that 50.6% of people with mental disorders also have a chronic medical condition. This is important to know because it shows how having a mental illness complicates chronic health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, auto-immune conditions (ex: Rheumatoid Arthritis), and neurologic conditions (ex: Parkinson's Disease).

Your physical and mental health clearly affect each other, and it can feel like a vicious cycle. So what can you do about it?

- Start by talking to your primary care doctor about how you are feeling. They can refer you to a mental health provider.
- Call our Member Services department to find providers or services in your area.
- Always keep all providers up-to-date on what medications, supplements, and herbs you take. Be honest with them about any recreational substances you may use. They can interact with your medications. If your mental health provider asks you to participate in counseling, seriously consider doing it. Having a neutral person (a counselor) that you honestly talk through your feelings with has been shown to improve the outcome of treatment. Allow both your mental health and primary care providers to share your information. It helps both providers give you the best possible care.
- Take all medications as prescribed. Once you start feeling better, do not stop your medications unless told to by your provider.
- Medications can have side effects. If you start having unexpected or severe side effects, notify the provider who prescribed the medicine so they can help you find one that works better for you.
- If you ever start thinking about self-harm or suicide, call your mental health provider, primary care provider, the Suicide and Crisis Hotline at 988, or go to the nearest emergency room!

Remember that whatever mental health diagnosis you are dealing with, you are not alone. There is no shame in having a mental illness. It is an illness, just like any physical diagnosis you may have. By working with all your providers, you can improve both your mental and physical health.