

Chronic illness and depression

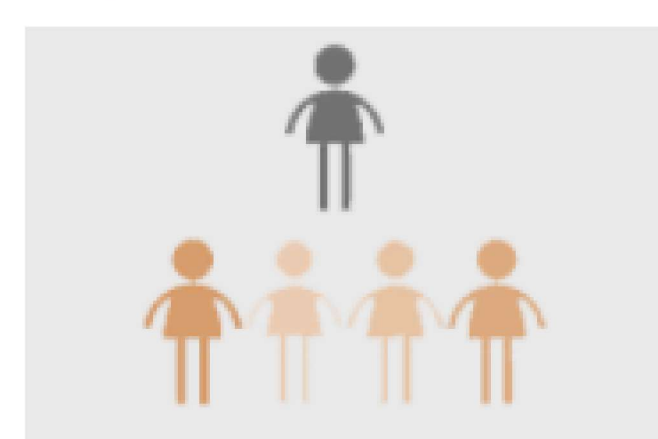
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- Symptoms to look for
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Chronic illness and depression

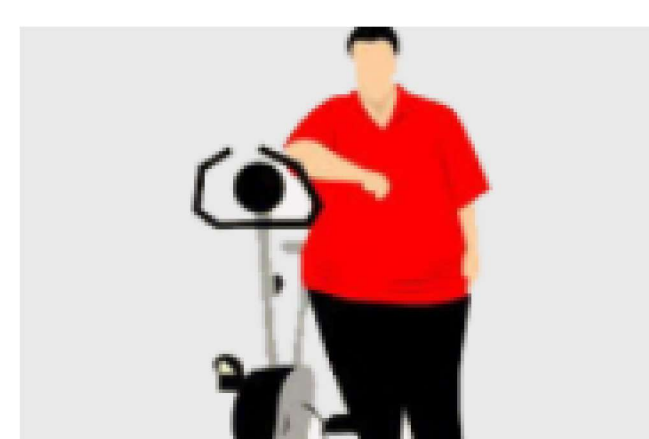
People with chronic medical illness are at a high risk of developing depression. Normal life events, even in the absence of a chronic illness, can cause depressive episodes. Depression is caused by a combination of genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological factors. So, a chronic illness which interferes with a person's ability to function well can be a major contributor to depression. The relationship between chronic illness and depression is complex and may vary from person to person.^{1,2}

Further, chronic illness may occur before depression starts, may cause depression, or may even be a result of it. Some very serious medical conditions can trigger depression. A study reported that 40% of people with post-traumatic stress disorder experienced depression 4 months after the initial traumatic event.²

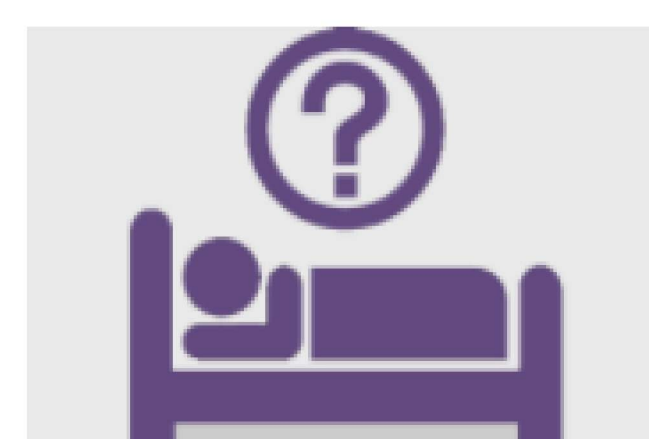
Symptoms to look for



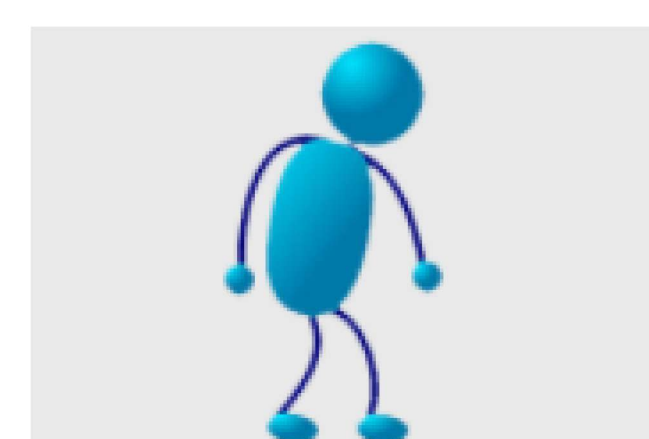
Loss of interest in usual activities



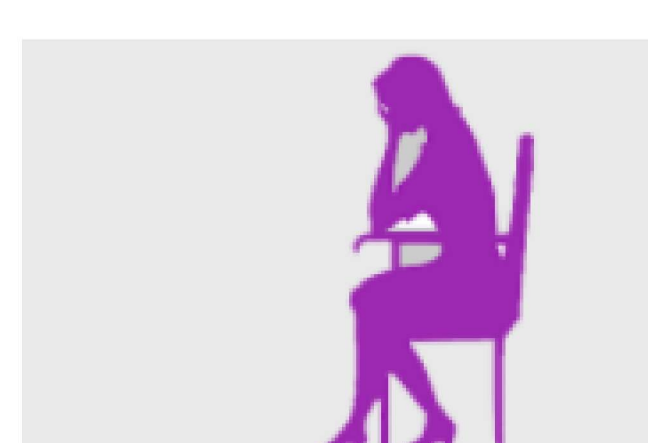
Significant changes in appetite or weight unrelated to chronic illness



Loss of sleep or sleeping too much



Fatigue that is unrelated to chronic illness



Feelings of worthlessness or guilt





Slow thinking or difficulty concentrating





Suicidal thoughts or actions

If you are managing a chronic illness and notice these symptoms, talk to your doctor.³ If you experience the symptoms of depression, you can follow the steps below to improve your situation:^{2,4}

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See your doctor as soon as possible. Do not wait to get evaluated.
- 


Discuss a good fitness routine with your doctor. Stay active with appropriate exercises for your well-being and medical condition.
- 


Explore the option of "talk therapy" (or psychotherapy) with a professional. There are many types of psychotherapy to help manage negative thinking or see yourself and your situation in more positive ways.
- 


Understand your treatment options. For mild or moderate depression, psychotherapy may be the best option. For more severe or recurring depression, a combination of medication and psychotherapy is often recommended.

How to get help²

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Your family doctor can help you decide if you should see a mental health specialist. He or she can also refer you to an experienced psychiatrist or psychologist.
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Community mental health centers and peer support groups can help provide support and guidance.
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If you have thoughts of suicide or have attempted suicide, and are not sure where to seek help, visit an emergency room doctor who can provide temporary help and point you in the right direction to get further support.
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Do not overlook depression occurring with a chronic illness. It is important to get educated about depression and get the help you need.

References

1. About the Multiple Chronic Conditions Initiative | Initiative on Multiple Chronic Conditions | U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: About the Multiple Chronic Conditions Initiative [Internet]. hhs.gov. 2016 [Cited 11 June 2019]. Available at <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/about-ash/multiple-chronic-conditions/about-mcc/index.html>
2. Mackell JA. Recognizing and Managing Depression When You Have a Chronic Illness [Internet]. 2014 [Cited 11 June 2019]. Available at <https://www.getthehealthystayhealthy.com/articles/recognizing-and-managing-depression-when-you-have-chronic-illness>
3. Know the warning signs | National Alliance on Mental Illness: Learn More [Internet]. nami.org. 2019 [Cited 11 June 2019]. Available at <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Know-the-Warning-Signs>
4. Depression | National Institute of Mental Health: Health Topics [Internet]. nimh.nih.gov. 2018 [Cited 11 June 2019]. Available at <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>

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