



# WELLNESS

## Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

March 2009

### Mind and Body Connection

#### Understanding Depression with a Chronic Condition

When you get the news that you have a chronic medical condition, it can be devastating. Questions seem to come from every angle. And, you may have many unexpected feelings: denial, anger, depression and more. It's important to realize that your physical and mental health can be tied together. When you understand the emotions you're having, it can be easier to care for both mind and body and start feeling better.

#### How Depression Affects a Chronic Medical Illness

Having a chronic medical illness means you have a persistent and long-lasting disease or medical condition. Examples include heart disease, diabetes or Parkinson's disease.

Until you're diagnosed, it's difficult to predict how you'll react to all the changes. Your new day-to-day routine may be unfamiliar. You also may have more doctor visits, trips to the hospital or medical tests. Depending on your condition, you may be in pain. And, you may feel a change in your level of freedom.

It's no wonder, then, that your spirit may feel battered. You're not alone — as many as one-third of people with serious medical conditions have depression symptoms during their illness. Studies show that emotions can affect your physical health as well. Compared to people with a chronic illness — but without depression — you may have:

- Higher medical costs
- More severe physical and mental symptoms
- Greater difficulty adjusting to the illness

But, there's good news. Just as your body's illness can affect your emotions, the reverse is also true. Your mental well-being can impact your physical health in a positive way. Research shows that treating your depression can help improve your chronic condition. That's why it's so important to recognize your feelings and talk with your doctor.

Here are some important things you should know about recognizing depression with a chronic illness:

- **Symptoms are sometimes overlooked.** For those with a chronic condition, symptoms aren't always seen as depression. The patient or family members may assume that feeling depressed is expected for someone struggling with a serious illness.
- **Symptoms of depression are not identical for everyone.** We all cope differently. If you or your loved one has any signs of depression, contact your health care professional immediately.

While you may have to live with a chronic condition for the rest of your life, it doesn't have to rule your life. United Behavioral Health is here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges.

## Be Aware of the Signs

Common symptoms of depression include:

- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- Appetite changes
- Sleep changes
- Loss of interest in activities that once were enjoyable
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of energy
- Irritability

If you think that you may be suffering from depression, talk with your doctor. He or she may recommend that you meet with a behavioral health professional.

## How to Cope

If you've been diagnosed with a chronic medical illness, there are mental and emotional challenges. Adapting to your condition may seem impossible at first. But, it can be done.

A behavioral health provider can work with you and your doctor to help you build your emotional well-being. Here are some other suggestions for coping with a chronic medical illness:

- **Stay connected.** Maintain strong relationships with friends and family. Join a support group with others who are facing similar challenges.
- **Take care of yourself.** Don't allow worries to get in the way of eating properly, getting rest and exercise, and having fun.
- **Maintain a daily routine.** Keep a consistent schedule of work, household chores and hobbies. This will give you a feeling of stability during the uncertainty of your illness.

Attitude makes a difference. Accepting that you have a serious medical condition is an important step on the road to a brighter day.

## Resources

### **Employee Assistance Program (EAP): United Behavioral Health (UBH)**

Toll-free number: 1-866-248-4105 (7 days/24 hours)

Access code: 61570

[www.liveandworkwell.com](http://www.liveandworkwell.com)

Visit the Depression Mental Health Condition Center to learn more about depression, its treatment and what you can do to help yourself.

*The information and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for educational purposes only and are not meant to be used in place of professional clinical consultations for individual health needs. Certain treatments may not be covered in some benefit plans. Check your health plan regarding your coverage of services.*