

informedhealthonline.org

INDEPENDENT, OBJECTIVE AND EVIDENCE-BASED

Depression after heart attack: Is there a link between depression and heart problems?



Many people become depressed after having a heart attack, and depression can make heart problems worse. Treating depression could improve the quality of life in people who are depressed after a heart attack.

Many people become depressed after having a heart attack, and depression can make heart problems worse. Treating depression could improve the quality of life in people who are depressed after a heart attack.

The most common cause of death in industrial countries is myocardial infarction (heart attack). But many people who survive a heart attack become depressed for a while. Milder symptoms of depression usually get better by themselves a short time after a heart attack. However, some people develop more major depression, which can last longer.

Despite the importance of this illness, not enough is known about how common depression is after a heart attack, and how to successfully treat it. This is why researchers from the American Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) systematically reviewed the evidence about this topic. The research they found had been done in the USA and Europe. Among other things, they were interested in:

- how many people became depressed after a heart attack,
- how many people were still depressed 1 or 2 months after the heart attack, and
- whether treatment was shown to help.

One conclusion of their study: about 1 in 5 people admitted to the hospital with a heart attack develops major depression. However, many more have milder symptoms of depression.

Some studies show that the majority of people who become depressed while in the hospital for a heart attack may still be depressed 1 to 4 months after discharge from the hospital. Sometimes major depression after a heart attack could still affect psychological and physical health as many as 5 years later.

The researchers confirmed that it is possible that there is a physical connection between depression and heart problems. Major depression could add to the risks of people who have had a heart attack. It could also slow down recovery, and increase their chances of dying earlier.

The researchers also came to the conclusion that psychological treatment together with the right medication can probably reduce depression after a heart attack. Because of this, treatment can also most likely improve the

quality of life of people who have major depression after a heart attack. But it is still not certain whether or not treatment can reduce the risk of a heart attack or the risk of dying earlier. Some kinds of anti-depressants are not suitable for use by people with heart problems, so it is important to talk to a doctor before using these drugs.

In 2007 and 2008, researchers from Canada and the Netherlands also analyzed studies about depression following a heart attack. Their results confirm the conclusions of the AHRQ researchers. Also, some research showed that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) might be able to help people with depression after a heart attack. You can read about how CBT works here (URL: <http://www.gesundheitsinformation.de/cognitive-behavioural-ther> .

If you would like to know more about how someone who is depressed can be supported by friends and family you can find information here (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.217.en.html>) .

Author: German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)

Glossary

evidence

Evidence is what we call scientific proof from well-conducted, good-quality scientific trials that have been carefully designed to answer specific questions. Depending on the types of questions, different scientific research methods (types of study) are most appropriate to find reliable answers to these questions. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs), for example, are the best way to get reliable evidence on the effectiveness of medical treatments (interventions). This type of study, however, is not the best form of evidence for all possible questions, and does not provide the best answers to all kinds of questions, either. Epidemiological studies, for example, are very suitable for establishing well-founded proof for the spreading of a disease in the population.

depression

Depression is one of the most common mental illnesses, and it can be mild, moderate or serious. There are several different types of depression that can be recognised by different signs. Which symptoms of depression occur and how strong and frequent they are vary from person to person. People in any social or age group can be affected, both women and men. If someone has had at least two of the following symptoms for longer than two weeks, it might mean that they are depressed: deep sadness; listlessness; loss of interest in the things they usually care about.

AHRQ

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is an agency of the US Department of Health and Human Services. Its mission is to improve the quality, safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of health care for all Americans. Information from AHRQ's research aims to help people make more informed decisions and to improve the quality of health care services. AHRQ was formerly known as the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research. You can read more about AHRQ at its website: www.ahrq.gov

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is an agency of the US Department of Health and Human Services. Its mission is to improve the quality, safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of health care for all Americans. Information from AHRQ's research aims to help

people make more informed decisions and to improve the quality of health care services. AHRQ was formerly known as the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research. You can read more about AHRQ at its website: www.ahrq.gov

Sources

IQWiG health information is based on research in the international literature. We identify the most scientifically reliable knowledge currently available, particularly so-called “systematic reviews”. These summarize and analyze the results of scientific research on the benefits and harms of treatments and other health care interventions. You can read more about systematic reviews and why these can provide the most trustworthy evidence about the state of knowledge here (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.61.en.html>) . The authors of the major systematic reviews on which our information is based are always approached to help us ensure the medical and scientific accuracy of our products.

Bush DE, Ziegelstein RC, Patel UV, Thombs BD, Ford DE, Fauerbach JA, McCann UD, Stewart KJ, Tsilidis KK, Patel AL, Feuerstein CJ, Bass EB. *Post-myocardial infarction depression*. Evidence Report/Technology Assessment No. 123. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. May 2005. [Full text (URL: <http://www.ahrq.gov/downloads/pub/evidence/pdf/postmiddep/midep.html>)]

Thombs BD, de Jonge P, Coyne JC, Whooley MA et al. Depression screening and patient outcomes in cardiovascular care: a systematic review. *JAMA* 2008; 300: 2161-2171. [PubMed summary (URL: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19001627?dopt=Abstract>)]

Van der Kooy K, van Hout H, Marwijk H, Marten H et al. Depression and the risk for cardiovascular diseases: systematic review and meta analysis. *Int J Geriatr Psychiatry* 2007; 22: 613-626. [PubMed summary (URL: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17236251?dopt=Abstract>)]

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) was established by legislation to provide evaluations of the effectiveness, quality and efficiency of healthcare services. This includes the assessment of medicines as well as the publication of health information for consumers and patients.

Evidence basis of our health information

Our information is based primarily on systematic reviews of the effects of health care. Systematic reviews are necessary to gain an objective picture of health care. In order to do this, a clear question is formulated. Researchers then find all the relevant studies that could answer this question. They then evaluate those studies.

You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at **www.informedhealthonline.org**

Disclaimer

This information was prepared and published by the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG). It is based on the evidence and other scientific literature available at the time of publication. The information is intended for the use of patients in Germany. It is not intended to for use to diagnose illnesses and the information is not intended to substitute for medical advice.