

FACTS ABOUT

Chronic Illness

Information about depression in the chronically ill patient



Chronic illness can define many types of disease and illness. Some chronic illnesses are sporadic with symptoms appearing for a short period of time. Other chronic illnesses are constant and long lasting. Oftentimes chronic physical or mental illnesses causes stressful lifestyle changes, depression and physical limitations for patients.

According to the American Psychological Association in studies of patients more recently diagnosed with chronic illnesses, the highest risk of depressive symptoms occurred within the first two years of diagnosis. Depression further complicates the illness in that depression can cause suppressed appetite, decreased activity and additional feelings of helplessness. Most concerning, however, is that chronic illness coupled with the onset of depression can lead a person to have suicidal thoughts.

It is important for patients and primary care physicians to work closely together to determine if symptoms are due to the illness, side effects of medications or the onset of depression. Behaviors that are not normal for the patient should be reported to the physician. Watch for:

- Lack of interest, or withdrawal from family or friends.
- Lack of attention to personal medical care.
- Increased signs of depression.
- Increased irritability.
- Saying things like, "I can't keep my thoughts straight."
- Talking directly about suicide.
- Giving away possessions that are meaningful.
- Making preemptive final plans.

Tips for the Chronically Ill

- Approach the illness with a positive, but realistic, attitude.
- Develop a physical **and emotional** wellness plan.
- Stay connected with family, friends and support groups.
- Patients should do research on their illness and seek out information from other sufferers about lifestyle changes, symptoms and things that help others.
- Take care of yourself - eat healthy, exercise, get enough sleep and take medications as directed.
- Maintain a daily routine of work, hobbies and chores. This will help keep the mind organized and focussed.
- Talk with your support network (family, friends and neighbors) about your wellness plan, your goals and who to contact in an emergency. The support network can help keep you on track and will be more helpful if something does go wrong.



SUICIDE PREVENTION
FOUNDATION

Sources of Help

Western Colorado Suicide Prevention Foundation

<http://www.suicidepreventionfoundation.org>
(970) 683-6626

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org