

DROP-IN ARTICLE FOR ORGANIZATIONS' NEWSLETTERS

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT DIABETES AND DEPRESSION ARE LINKED

Anyone who has diabetes, or knows someone who has it, knows the physical burden it places on them. But there is another side to diabetes that physicians are just beginning to recognize; that's the toll it takes on emotional health.

Research shows that diabetes doubles the risk of depression, and that being depressed puts people at high risk for developing diabetes. This double threat of diabetes and depression is especially prominent among women age 45 and older and minorities.

"It is a vicious circle," said State Health Commissioner Karen Remley, M.D., M.B.A. "The effects of diabetes can make you depressed, and if you are depressed you may not take care of your diabetes as well as you should."

Anyone who has diabetes and depression should be treated for both diseases. But how do you know if you are depressed or just having a bad day. Here is an easy screening test: ask yourself whether, in the past two weeks, you have felt down, depressed and hopeless or whether you have had little interest or pleasure in doing things. If you answered yes to either of these questions you should talk to your doctor soon about the possibility of further screening or treatment.

As many as 400,000 adults in Virginia have been diagnosed with diabetes. Another 198,000 have it but don't know it. The two areas in the state that have the highest rate of people with diabetes are the Lenowisco Health District (Norton and Lee, Scott and Wise counties) and the Eastern Shore Health District (Accomack and Northampton counties). The National Institutes of Mental Health estimate that almost 10 percent of American adults, or 19 million people, experience some form of depression every year.

It is a myth that depression is a sign of weakness, said Dr. Remley. Depression is caused by a combination of physical, psychological and genetic factors. Differences in how an individual's brain works, how a person reacts to stresses such as diabetes and a family history of depression heighten the likelihood one may become depressed.

"The good news is that there are effective treatments for both diabetes and depression," said Dr. Remley. "It is essential that people with these diseases be treated for both."

For more information on diabetes and depression visit the Virginia Department of Health's Web site at www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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