



Major depression can impact your heart, weight, and more. Find out how to gain control of your physical health while managing recurrent depression.

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When seeking treatment for recurrent **depression**, your focus is on feeling better emotionally. But depression can take a major toll on your physical health as well, and that means key health concerns need to be part of your depression treatment plan too.

The Body-Mind Connection of Recurrent Depression

You're at a greater risk for depression when you have certain conditions, such as heart disease, stroke, and diabetes, but the connection works in the other direction too — and many of these illnesses are interrelated. Reasons include lifestyle issues associated with depression, such as poor sleep, **lack of exercise**, and inadequate nutrition, as well as possible medication side effects.

With recurrent depression, physical health risks you could be facing include:

Colds and viruses. When you're depressed, your body produces more stress hormones, which can affect your immune system, making it harder to fight infection, says Francine Rosenberg, PsyD, a clinical psychologist with the Morris Psychological Group in Parsippany, N.J. The stress of recurrent depression on your body can make you more susceptible to getting sick.

Obesity. Depression and anxiety seem to be associated with weight gain, and the use of antidepressants may be linked with obesity, according to **research** published in June 2014 in the journal PLoS One that looked at a group of 3,000 women 25 to 74 years old. Being overweight or obese puts you at greater risk for both type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Diabetes. Some of the lifestyle choices you might make when you're recurrently depressed, such as eating poorly and exercising less, can lead to weight gain, which can make you more susceptible to developing type 2 diabetes. In turn, diabetes further increases your risk for ailments such as heart disease.

Heart disease. If recurrent depression leads you to eat more junk food and become more sedentary, know that both habits can increase your risk for heart disease, says Patrick McGrath, PhD, a clinical psychologist and the director of the Center for Anxiety and Obsessive Compulsive Disorders at Alexian Brothers Behavioral Health Hospital in Hoffman Estates, Ill.

Depression itself is a risk factor for coronary artery disease (CAD), the most common type of heart disease. Women under the age of 55 who are depressed and have CAD are more likely to have a heart attack, die, or need artery-opening procedures than men or older women, according to a **study** published in June 2014 in the Journal of the American Heart Association. The reason is not entirely clear but may be related to inflammatory and hormonal factors.

Stroke. If you take an antidepressant called a monoamine oxidase inhibitor and you're eating foods or taking other medications with high levels of a chemical called tyramine, your blood pressure can spike and increase your risk for a stroke. Tyramine is commonly found in cheese, wine, pickles, smoked fish, and decongestant medications.

Osteoporosis. People with depression are more likely to have this bone-thinning disorder than those who aren't depressed. Part of this increased risk may stem from a negative effect on bone mineral density from depression itself. In addition, one of the most commonly used types of antidepressants, called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, also affect bone mineral density and lead to increased risk for fractures, according to a September 2012 [study](#) in the journal *Bone*.

Tips to Boost Your Physical Health With Recurrent Depression

There's much you can do to keep your physical health in check, and perhaps help your depression too. Some helpful steps to take include:

- **Develop a team approach.** Keep all your health care providers in the loop about conditions affecting your physical health. "Sign a release of information so all of your health care team members can work together to create a successful plan of treatment," Rosenberg says.
- **Practice good sleep hygiene.** This can include spending some time relaxing before bed in a warm bath or listening to soft music. Keep your bedroom cool and dark, and go to sleep and wake up at the same times each day. Getting some sunlight during the day can help you sleep better at night too.
- **Eat healthy.** When you make better food choices, you feel better physically and help lower your risk for many of the health problems that can accompany recurrent depression, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease.
- **Exercise regularly.** You may not feel motivated to exercise when you're depressed, but benefits including heart health, weight control, and relief of depression symptoms should help you get moving. Weight-bearing exercises, in particular, like walking and jogging, are good because they can also help protect your bones from osteoporosis. Plus, exercise helps your body release brain chemicals called endorphins, which can lower pain and boost your immune system. Exercise with a friend or to music, or try a class to help you stay motivated.
- **Stick with your medication and talk therapy regimen.** Addressing your recurrent depression also helps avoid the cascade of physical problems that can occur. If you're having trouble following your medication or talk therapy regimen, regroup with your health care providers to find an approach that works better for you.