

Mental health and coronary heart disease

Recent research by the Heart Foundation of Australia has concluded that there are strong links between depression, social isolation, the lack of quality social support and coronary heart disease (CHD) similar to the more conventional risk factors such as smoking, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure.

What is meant by depression, social isolation and quality social support?

A person may be depressed if, for more than two weeks they have felt sad, down or miserable, lost interest in things that they would normally enjoy, and experienced three or more symptoms across the following areas:

Physical – tired all the time, can't sleep.

Behaviours – not going out, not getting things done at work, relying on alcohol and sedatives.

Thoughts – thinking that “nothing good ever happens to me”, “I’m worthless”.

Feelings – guilty, unhappy, disappointed, no confidence.

Social isolation is when a person feels lonely. It is a well-established fact that the degree to which a person feels part of social relationships that provide friendship, love and meaning, as well as a sense of belonging, is a major influence on their mental and physical health.

A person who does not have quality social support is someone who doesn't have a variety of contacts with people who are available for practical and emotional support, such as someone to confide in, help out during tough times, or to just go out with.

Facts about mental health and CHD

- Depression, social isolation and lack of social support are significant risk factors for CHD.
- Within the first 12 months after a heart attack psychological factors such as depression can treble the risk of having another heart attack independent of other factors.
- About 800,000 Australian adults and 100,000 children and young people suffer depression each year.
- Depression affects on average one in five people in Australia at some point in their lifetime.
- Depression is common but can be easily identified and treated.
- For more information, see www.beyondblue.org.au and www.heartfoundation.com.au.
- Talk to your GP.

For counselling services call Lifeline on 1300 13 11 14