



Depression and Heart Disease

(American Heart Association)

Heart disease and depression are interwoven, and a new study is helping unravel that connection by linking depression with poorer scores on seven important measures of heart health.

The research included more than 4,000 people taking part in a national survey who had been screened for depression using a basic questionnaire. Participants were evaluated for weight, smoking, diet, physical activity, blood sugar, cholesterol and high blood pressure – measures known as the American Heart Association's.

After adjusting for factors such as age, race and income, the researchers found people with symptoms of severe depression were 3.1 times more likely to have worse cardiovascular health than people without depression. People with mild-to-moderate depression were 1.4 times more likely.

"Whether it's because they're depressed and they don't want to move around, or they're not taking care of themselves, or they're unable to get medication, (these) are things that we have to look for in other research," said Medoff, a resident physician at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

People with depression are more likely to develop heart disease. And people with heart disease can experience depression. In fact, research suggests 15% to 30% of people with cardiovascular disease have depression – a rate two to three times higher than the general population.

Celano said some of the connection is probably behavioral. People who are depressed are more likely to smoke, less likely to be active and tend to have a less healthy diet.

But depression also has a physical side. It affects the nervous system in ways that can raise blood pressure and heart rate. It affects blood platelets, which can increase the risk of clotting. It's also been associated with inflammation, which is linked to many diseases.

"Depression and depressive symptoms are not just in the brain," Celano said. "Your brain is connected to every other part of your body. We know more and more that these connections between the brain and the rest of the body go both ways. So, things that happen in your body can affect how you think and feel. And changes in your brain can affect many different parts of your body, including your heart."