

Stress Vs. Depression: Learn The Difference And How To Help Yourself

(ARA) - Times of sadness, stress and anxiety are common to everyone and can be triggered by numerous factors. In response to tough situations, about 25 percent of Americans will experience sadness that may seem like depression, but the good news is that these feelings are often temporary.

Sometimes, overwhelming feelings of sadness remain persistent and significantly interfere with a person's behavior, physical health and interaction with others. In these situations, depression could be the underlying cause.

Depression can be serious and is most likely caused by a combination of genetic, biological, environmental and psychological factors. Depression can be linked to substance abuse and even suicide. If you feel sad, worthless, and hopeless every day for two weeks or more, it's time to take a mental health screening to see if you are at-risk for depression.

Anonymous, online screenings are available at www.helpyourselfhelpothers.org. Screening for depression and other mood disorders is important as it allows you to identify warning signs early on, before things become serious. Depression screenings can help you determine whether what you are experiencing is a simple case of the blues or something more serious that requires seeing a health professional.

"Just like any other disease, there are certain risk factors that can lead to depression," says Dr. Douglas G. Jacobs, president of Screening for Mental Health, a non-profit organization committed to promoting the improvement of mental health. "It's important to learn the signs and symptoms of depression, such as changes in appetite, loss of energy or loss of interest in your usual activities, as well as the necessary steps you can take to improve your health."

Depression can cloud your mind, zap your energy and make anyone feel discouraged. It can be difficult to take action and get help, but there are ways you can help yourself, starting right now. First, take a free, anonymous screening at www.helpyourselfhelpothers.org. Additionally, you can try these self-care tips:

- Take care of your mind and body.
- Take part in activities you usually enjoy (movies, concerts, community events, sporting events, etc.).
- Avoid drugs and alcohol.
- Eat a well-balanced, healthy diet.
- Get enough sleep.

- Focus on what's doable.
- Do not expect to suddenly "snap out" of your depression.
 - If you have a decision you feel overwhelmed by, discuss it with others who know you well and have a more objective view of your situation.
 - Break up large tasks into small ones, set some priorities and do what you can, as you can.

- Celebrate small steps.
- Often during treatment for depression, sleep and appetite will begin to improve before your depressed mood lifts.
 - Expect your mood to improve gradually, not immediately.
 - Remind yourself that positive thoughts will replace negative feelings as your depression responds to treatment.

If you or someone you love is in immediate danger because of thoughts of suicide please call 911 immediately. If you are not in immediate danger but need to talk to someone, you can call the national suicide prevention line at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

Social Support Cuts Breast Cancer Deaths By Almost Half

Being loved and feeling loved can help prevent a recurrence of cancer and reduce fatality rates among those battling the disease, offers a new study published in the Journal of Clinical Oncology.

A strong social support system can play a large role in how people diagnosed with cancer manage the disease. Those with emotionally satisfying relationships may have prolonged life expectancy or even ward off a relapse of cancer later on.

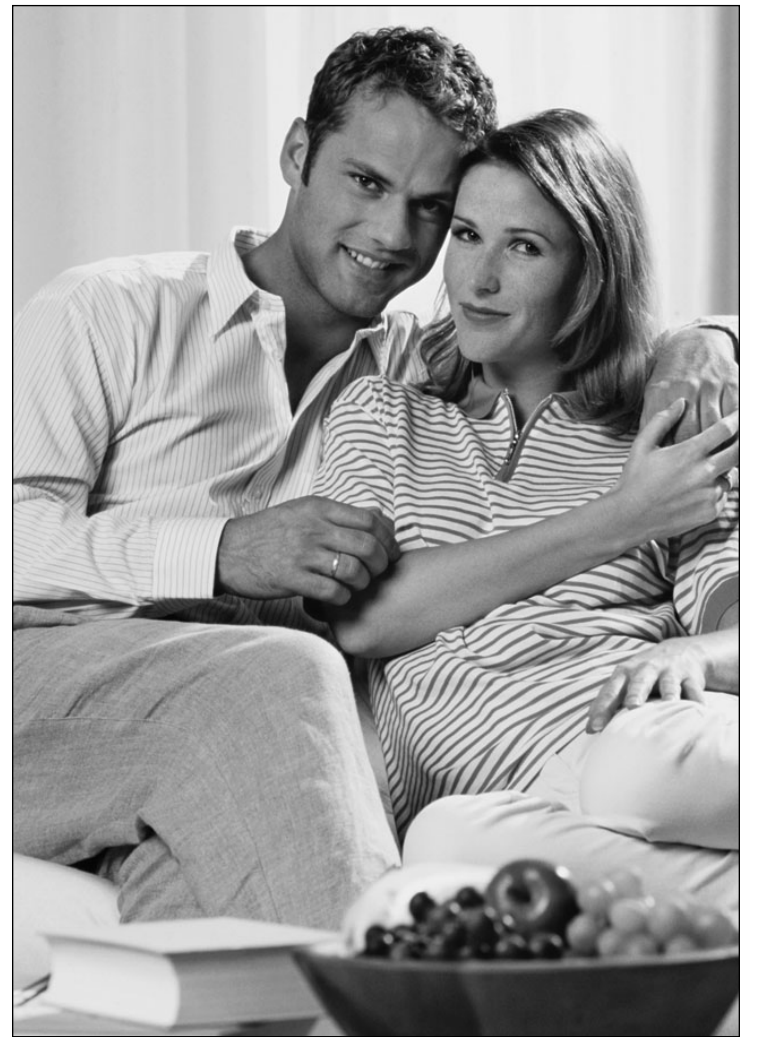
The study was conducted by Vanderbilt University Medical Center and the Shanghai Institute of Preventative Medicine over the last eight years. Researchers worked with patients enrolled in the Shanghai Breast Cancer Survivor Study who completed a quality of life survey after six months of being diagnosed with cancer. The majority of patients completed a follow-up survey 30 months later. Responses on different physical issues were calculated into a general quality of life score.

Roughly five years later, researchers documented participants who had cancer recurrences or had died from the disease. Compared to women with low scores, women who had the highest quality of life score had a 48 percent reduction in another cancer occurrence and a 38 percent reduction in the risk of death.

The findings of the study indicate that strong emotional and social support early after a diagnosis of breast cancer can be a strong ally in a woman or man's fight with the disease. Oncologists and therapists can use these study results to help develop a support network for breast cancer patients as part of the course of treatment for the disease. Such social support is especially important in the first year after a cancer diagnosis. Marital satisfaction is also a key factor in the quality of life a person with breast cancer may have.

Should a person be diagnosed with breast cancer, there are a number of things he or she can do to improve the support network.

- Spend considerable time talking and sharing moments with your spouse and children.
- Surround yourself with positive minded people.
- Connect with breast cancer survivors through a local organization in the community or online.
- Participate in events designed to raise money and awareness for the fight against breast cancer.
- Accept help and support from others when it is needed.
- Consider psychological counseling if an added boost is needed.
- Share your experiences with others who may be in similar situations.
- Volunteer your time doing something that has nothing to do with the disease, like a club or activity.



A strong marriage is part of the support system that can help prolong the life of someone diagnosed with breast cancer, and can also reduce the risk of cancer recurrence.

Genetics And Breast Cancer Intertwined

The factors that affect breast cancer risk are numerous. Some of those factors are simple. For example, being a woman and getting older automatically increases the risk for breast cancer. Other factors are more complex.

Among the more complex risk factors for breast cancer is genetics. Every cell in the body is made of genetic material, or genes. These genes affect nearly every function of the body and, when working properly, help the body stay healthy. However, sometimes genes fail to perform their job at full capacity. When this happens, an error known as a mutation occurs. These mutations can be inherited or spontaneous, and either type of mutation can increase a person's risk for illness and disease.

In the case of breast cancer, scientists have pinpointed two genes that, when mutated, can play an important role in the development of breast cancer. BRCA1 and BRCA2 are genes everyone has, and some people inherit a mutated form of BRCA1 or BRCA2 that increases their risk for breast cancer. However, according to the

American Cancer Society, such inherited gene mutations account for just five to 10 percent of all cases of breast cancer in the United States. Mutated BRCA genes can be spontaneous and even occur in men. Men who carry these abnormal genes are at greater risk of prostate cancer, and men carrying the mutated BRCA2 gene have an increased risk of breast cancer as well.

While the discovery of the gene linked to breast cancer is an important one, concerned men and women might want to know they have inherited the gene mutation. A genetic counselor can help individuals decode their family's health history and interpret the results of genetic testing. For those interested in genetic testing, the counselor will need a thorough family health history and will then have men and women go through pre-test counseling to determine if it's necessary to go through with genetic testing. During the pre-test counseling, a counselor will explain the procedure, what its risks and benefits are, its cost, and other potential ramifications, including what patients

will do once they learn the results of the test. Learning the results can be an especially emotional moment, and pre-test counseling helps men and women prepare for learning those results.

For those who go through with the genetic testing, a blood sample will be taken and results are typically available within three weeks. The counselor will then help patients interpret the results. The National Cancer Institute (www.cancer.gov) can help interested parties find a genetic counselor.

Men and women wary of testing should know that certain factors might help determine if they have inherited a mutation in their BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene. Those factors include:

- your mother, sister or daughter has had breast cancer before age 50
- your mother, sister or daughter has had ovarian cancer at any age
- a female relative has had both breast cancer and ovarian cancer
- a female relative has had breast cancer in both breasts

- a male relative has had breast cancer
- More information is available at www5.komen.org.

Did you know?

Celiac disease is a condition that damages the lining of the small intestine, preventing it from absorbing parts of food.

When a person has Celiac disease, his or her immune system attacks the villi, or areas along the lining of the small intestine, whenever foods that contain gluten are eaten. The damage that results from such an attack makes it hard for the body to properly absorb nutrients, causing many people to become malnourished regardless of how much food is consumed.

Found in foods such as bread

and pasta, gluten is a protein that can be avoided if people adopt a gluten-free diet. Such a diet means avoiding foods, beverages and even medications that contain wheat, barley, rye, and possibly even oats. While a gluten-free diet won't cure Celiac disease, it can cause the symptoms to disappear and help the villi heal.

Celiac disease is often mistaken for irritable bowel syndrome, so if such a condition has been diagnosed but nothing seems to be working, men and women should request they be tested for Celiac disease.

Sinus Health Tips To Help You Feel Better Through Flu, Cold Season

(ARA) - If you're a "seasonal allergy" sufferer, you know the term "seasonal" can be a misnomer. Allergy symptoms can flare up year-round, even during the height of cold and flu season. Just as cold and flu season doesn't stop when winter ends, allergies don't necessarily disappear just because summer is over. Taking care of your sinuses year-round can help you feel better whatever the season.

"Sinus health is the foundation for good respiratory health,"

says Mike Tringale, vice president at the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA). "And we are increasingly finding that relieving nasal congestion makes a huge impact on the quality of life for people of all ages."

AAFA offers some tips for reducing sinus symptoms, whether they're caused by allergies, a cold or the flu:

- To reduce your chance of catching a cold, avoid touching your face or nose. Wash your

hands with hot water and soap regularly, especially after being in public places like stores, transit stations, schools or offices.

- To clear out nasal congestion, consider naturally derived saline moisturizers, available at most retailers, year-round. Drug-free and preservative-free options like can be used as frequently as needed because it's made of purified water and sodium chloride.
- Talk to your doctor about getting a flu shot each year to try

to avoid getting the flu. However, if you feel flu-like symptoms, talk to your doctor within the first few days to get medications that will reduce the severity.

- Manage your seasonal allergies by reading daily pollen counts and limiting your outdoor exposure on high-pollen days, and keep windows and doors closed during the morning hours before noon, when pollen tends to be most prevalent in the air.

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