Depression after Brain Injury

Grief and feelings of loss are common after many illnesses. Dealing with life after a brain injury involves adjustment. As you or a loved one learns to deal with changes in your lives, you may have feelings of sadness, anxiety, frustration, or anger. When these emotions change into depression, it is important to seek help.

Depression is a common emotional reaction to brain injury. Sometimes, depression is caused by the physical damage that the injury causes to the brain. Depression often appears in the first 3 months, but the risk can be there for a year or longer. It is common for depression to occur during the later stages of recovery when there is less confusion and the person becomes more self-aware. Depression can hamper recovery and rehabilitation. Talk to your doctor if you are feeling depressed or sad.

Signs of depression

When a person is depressed, he or she has several signs nearly every day that last at least 2 weeks.

Check (√) off any signs you or a loved one has had for 2 weeks or more:

- Loss of interest and pleasure in activities you have enjoyed
- Feeling sad, irritable, empty, or down in the dumps
- Restless, unable to sit still, or feeling slow
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Feeling pessimistic or hopeless
- Thoughts of death or harming oneself
- Changes in appetite, weight loss, or weight gain
- Change in sleep patterns, such as not sleeping or sleeping too much
- Problems concentrating, thinking, remembering, or making decisions
- Loss of energy or feeling tired all of the time
- Loss of interest in sex

If you have any of these symptoms for more than 2 weeks, or if you have had thoughts of suicide or of trying to harm yourself or others, talk to your doctor.
Preventing depression

- Learn about brain injury to help lessen your fears. Talk to your healthcare team about your questions and concerns.
- Make the most of rehabilitation and keep a journal to track your progress. The more you recover, the better you will feel.
- Spend time with family and friends. Talk about your feelings.
- Maintain interests and hobbies.
- Exercise.
- Talk to your doctor or other members of your healthcare team as soon as you notice signs of depression.

Where to get help

- In the hospital, talk with your nurse, doctor, psychologist, social worker, or therapist. They can provide or recommend help for you.
- After discharge, talk to your primary care doctor or social worker.
- To make an appointment or get a referral, call Ohio State Rehabilitation Psychology at 614-293-3830. They can give you information about available mental health services.
- In an emergency, call 911 or go to or call the Emergency Department at Ohio State University Hospital at 614-293-8333.

Treatment for depression includes counseling, medicines, or both. If you start medicines for depression, do not stop taking them without talking to your doctor first.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or e-mail health-info@osu.edu.

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