

HEART DISEASE

This module provides information about heart disease to people with mental-health problems.

Heart disease is a common illness that affects millions of people all over the world, and many more have the disease but do not know it because they do not have symptoms.

Some people are more likely to develop the disease than others, such as those who are obese, have a family history of heart disease, or have depression or a mental-health problem.

But what if you have heart disease and a mental-health problem? This module provides information about heart disease including the importance of understanding heart disease and:

- Mental-health
- Its symptoms
- Its diagnosis
- Its risk factors
- Its management.



You can make a big difference in reducing or preventing your risk of developing heart disease.



HEART DISEASE AND MENTAL-HEALTH

People with mental-health problems may be at increased risk for developing heart disease. It is important that you inform your healthcare provider if you already have heart disease.

Having an unhealthy lifestyle, such as little physical activity, a poor diet, and smoking, can increase your risk of/or worsen your heart disease. Some antipsychotic medications, like other types of medications, may cause weight gain, diabetes and abnormal lipid profiles, all of which can increase your risk of heart disease.

The risk of gaining weight, diabetes, or abnormal lipid profiles may differ depending on the type of antipsychotic drug that you are taking. You should speak with your healthcare provider about which antipsychotic medication is right for you, and whether you need to change your dose or type of medication.

Remember that not everyone who takes antipsychotic medications will necessarily gain weight, develop diabetes or abnormal lipid profiles.

Some antipsychotic medications may interfere with the drugs that you are taking for your heart disease. It is therefore important that you inform your healthcare provider of all the medicines that you are taking, including over-the-counter drugs.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HEART DISEASE?

There are many different symptoms of heart disease, and not everyone with the disease will experience all symptoms. Some of them include:

- Pain or pressure in the chest
- Swollen ankles
- Dizzy spells
- Irregular heartbeats
- Shortness of breath
- Leg pain
- Numbness or weakness in an arm or leg.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR HEART DISEASE?

There are many risk factors for heart disease, and having multiple risk factors will increase your risk for heart disease even further. Some risk factors can not be controlled, such as advanced age, gender, and family history of heart disease. However, some of the major risk factors can be controlled, including:

- Smoking – prolonged exposure to cigarette smoke increases your risk of developing heart disease by around 3–5 fold
- Obesity and physical inactivity
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Abnormal lipid profiles
- High levels of stress.

HOW IS HEART DISEASE DIAGNOSED?

In diagnosing heart disease, doctor's usually rely on the results of specific tests. However, test results are just part of the information that goes into the diagnosis of heart disease. Your physical health, presence or absence of symptoms, health behaviours, family and medical history, and other risk factors are all considered.

Some of the main tests used to help diagnose heart disease include:

- Physical examination.
- Blood pressure and heart rate.
- An electrocardiogram (ECG) – is a simple, painless test that records the electrical activity of your heart.
- Blood tests – to measure lipid profiles, hormones, and various other chemicals in the blood.

Remember that many of the disorders of heart disease can be silent, so many people may have reached an advanced stage years before they show any symptoms. Heart disease can be treated effectively, but if left untreated, it can lead to further problems.

It is therefore important that you have regular check-ups with your healthcare team to ensure that you do not develop heart disease, and/or to prevent and reduce your risk of worsening heart disease.



MANAGEMENT OF HEART DISEASE

Some of the best ways in which you can manage heart disease includes the following:

- Have regular check-ups with your healthcare provider. Remember that your physical health is just as important as your mental-health.
- Lose excess weight and keep it off.
- Exercise more frequently to improve your physical fitness, to lose weight, and to normalise your blood sugar levels – try to progressively increase your physical activity to at least 30 minutes a day.
- Eat a healthy diet that is low in saturated fats (e.g. meat based processed food such as hamburgers), salt and sugar.
- Limit the amount of alcohol that you consume.
- Drink plenty of water – at least 2 litres a day.
- Try not to smoke – stopping is ideal, but even cutting back reduces your risk of heart disease.
- Have your blood pressure measured regularly.
- Have your blood lipids measured periodically.
- Inform all members of your healthcare team that you have heart disease, and encourage them to speak with each other so that they are aware of the different types of treatments that you may be receiving, and can therefore determine how best to treat you.

Remember that you can make a big difference in reducing or preventing your risk of developing heart disease – so the sooner you start implementing these changes, the lower your risk will be.

