

IT'S NOT IN YOUR HEAD... PHYSICAL SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

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What comes to mind when you think about depression or anxiety? Would you describe symptoms like sadness, anger, sleep problems, nervousness or lack of interest in normal activities? However, most emotional and mental health problems also have many physical features. If you are not aware of them you might not understand what is wrong and instead seek out medical treatments that will not treat the source of the problem.

A word of caution before we discuss these attributes. It is essential to seek a medical diagnosis for physical problems before you decide you are suffering from depression, anxiety or another mental health condition. You could miss a serious medical problem if you skip this step. Once you have ruled out an illness or other physical issue you can obtain a referral for an assessment with a mental health professional.

Why are there physical signs of emotional conditions? Our mind and body are one and all of our thoughts, feelings, and physical experiences inseparable. Sometimes we forget and experience ourselves as a brain being carried about in our body. However, every thought we have triggers a feeling and a physical response. If we have a positive thought such as a happy experience with a loved one we feel pleasant emotions such as joy and physical feelings such as warmth spreading through our body. On the other hand, if we think about something negative such as a car accident we might feel anger and a tightening feeling in our muscles. These are automatic reactions caused by the release of certain chemicals in our brains. They

happen continuously. Normally, this is not a problem. The thoughts are temporary and so are the physical reactions. However, when we experience ongoing problems that become depression, anxiety and other emotional stresses the physical symptoms also last and lead to more intense and chronic physical consequences.

What are the physical manifestations of emotional problems? Here is a list of physical symptoms:

- back pain/neck pain
- change in appetite/weight loss or gain
- chest pain
- diarrhea or constipation
- dry mouth
- extreme tiredness
- general aches and pains/feeling weak
- insomnia (trouble sleeping)
- high blood pressure
- headaches
- light-headedness/dizziness
- palpitations (the feeling that your heart is racing)
- sexual problems
- shortness of breath
- stiff neck
- sweating/hot flashes
- upset stomach/churning feelings
- pins and needles/tingling feelings

You can see how easy it might be to believe you are ill or even worse that you have a serious prob-

lem such as heart disease if you are living with these types of symptoms. It is also true that emotional factors do deteriorate your immune system and leave you more vulnerable to developing physical health issues. The opposite is also the case. Medical problems can cause directly or indirectly to the development of depression, anxiety and other mental health problems. For example, brain injury may lead to uncontrollable bouts of anger and despondency when the emotional center in the brain is damaged.

The good news is that there are ways to help yourself lower the tendency to develop depression and anxiety having non-medical causes. Research shows that poor physical and emotional health increase the chances you will become depressed or anxious. By taking good care of yourself through healthy eating and even mild exercise such as walking twenty minutes a day can help. Making sure you get into a daily routine that includes the above as well as decent sleep, hygiene and time to relax also are beneficial.

If you find you can relate to the above list and if you have not found a solution it could be time for a two-step process. Make an appointment with your physician to see if you have a medical condition. Once physical problems are ruled out go to a clinic for an assessment appointment and you will find there are answers that will improve your life. The excellent staff at Affiliated Clinical Services provides a full range of services.