

For many heart patients, depression can be an unexpected part of recovery

Oct. 8 is National Depression Screening Day

ROME, GA., Date – Most people expect the physical challenges that come with a heart attack or heart disease diagnosis. What many don't expect is the emotional toll. Fear, anxiety, sadness and even depression can become part of recovery for some patients, sometimes lasting long after they leave the hospital.

Between 33% and 50% of heart attack survivors experience some form of psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, psychosocial stress or post-traumatic stress disorder, according to the American Heart Association. Roughly 1 in 3 develops symptoms of depression. Persistent psychological distress is also associated with an increased likelihood of future cardiac events, although researchers have not established a direct cause-and-effect relationship.

"Many people fear they'll have another medical emergency or that their diagnosis will require difficult treatment, surgery and hospital stays," said Dr. Maxwell Prempeh, an Atrium Health Floyd and Harbin Clinic cardiologist. "Others may grieve the life they envisioned, struggle to come to terms with their new reality or have concerns over how others view them. All of this can increase the likelihood of developing depression."

The relationship between heart health and emotional health works both ways. A heart attack or heart disease diagnosis can affect emotional well-being, while ongoing stress, anxiety and depression can affect cardiovascular health.

"Not only can heart attacks or heart disease diagnoses cause depression, but deep sadness or emotional stress can also cause transient heart disease such as cardiomyopathy," Prempeh said.

One example is stress-induced cardiomyopathy, also known as Takotsubo cardiomyopathy or "broken heart syndrome." The temporary condition can develop after intense emotional or physical stress and may closely resemble a heart attack, causing symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath and dizziness.

Stress-induced cardiomyopathy is uncommon, but cardiologists increasingly recognize it because its symptoms can look so much like a heart attack. Fortunately, most patients recover, and heart function often returns within several weeks with supportive care. Because its symptoms can mimic those of a heart attack, immediate medical evaluation is essential.

Prempeh said patients should know help is available for the emotional challenges that sometimes accompany a cardiac event.

"Fortunately, there are measures that can be taken from a clinical perspective to help patients with any mental health struggles they are experiencing alongside their cardiac diagnosis," he said. "We can talk through concerns related to their heart condition and connect them with resources that can improve their mental health and quality of life."

Patients may benefit from cardiac rehabilitation, support groups, counseling, heart-healthy lifestyle changes and stress-management techniques such as mindfulness or meditation. Cardiac rehabilitation programs often include stress-management education, mental health screening and referrals for additional support. Participation in cardiac rehabilitation after a heart attack is associated with reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress.

National Depression Screening Day, observed Oct. 8, serves as a reminder that emotional health is just as important as physical health.

Atrium Health Floyd and Harbin Clinic encourage patients recovering from a heart attack, heart procedure or heart disease diagnosis to discuss persistent feelings of depression, anxiety, stress or other emotional changes with their care team. Early recognition and support can improve quality of life and help patients navigate recovery with greater confidence.

Patients can learn more about depression care and available resources through Atrium Health Floyd and Harbin Clinic by visiting [Depression Care at Atrium Health Floyd and Harbin Clinic](#).

About Atrium Health Floyd and Harbin Clinic

With a more than 150-year history of serving the needs of patients and communities, the [Atrium Health Floyd](#) and Harbin Clinic family of health care services are a leading medical provider and economic force in northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama. More than 5,200 teammates at Atrium Health Floyd and Harbin Clinic provide care throughout the region, offering more than 40 medical specialties at its hospitals in Rome and Cedartown, Georgia, and Centre, Alabama. It is part of Charlotte, North Carolina-based [Advocate Health](#), the nation's third-largest nonprofit integrated health system with [Wake Forest University School of Medicine](#) as its academic core. Patients have access to the resources of a preeminent academic health system at the forefront of clinical excellence, innovation and research. Nationally recognized for expertise in heart and vascular, neurosciences, oncology, pediatrics and rehabilitation, Advocate Health is also a pioneer in the delivery of virtual health care. It's accelerating discovery by making research participation part of the standard-of-care through its one-of-a-kind [National Center for Clinical Trials](#), plus two affiliated life-sciences-focused innovation districts and is home to one of the nation's largest graduate medical education programs, with an experiential learning focus and specialized residencies to help protect the long-term sustainability of rural health care in America.

About Advocate Health

Headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, [Advocate Health](#) is the third-largest nonprofit, integrated health system in the United States. A preeminent academic health system at the forefront of clinical excellence, innovation and research, it delivers care under the names [Advocate Health Care](#) in Illinois and Indiana; [Atrium Health](#) in the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama; and [Aurora Health Care](#) in Wisconsin and Michigan and [Wake Forest University School of Medicine](#) is its academic core. Nationally recognized for expertise in heart and vascular, neurosciences, oncology, pediatrics and rehabilitation, Advocate Health is also a pioneer in the delivery of virtual health care. It is accelerating discovery by making research participation part of the standard-of-care through its one-of-a-kind [National Center for Clinical Trials](#), plus two affiliated life-sciences-focused innovation districts and one of the nation's largest graduate medical education programs. With more than 165,000 teammates serving patients at 69 hospitals and over 1,000 care locations across eight states, Advocate Health reinvests over \$6 billion each year to improve community health, making it one of the nation's largest providers of community benefit.

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