

Sinclair Community College, Division of Allied Health Technologies

Health Promotion for Community Health Workers – Cardiovascular disease and stroke

Class #17 Depression and Stress

(date)

Course Objectives:

Know risk factors and causes of heart disease, stroke, and cancer

Work with communities and community members to prevent heart disease, stroke, and reduce risk of cancer by encouraging healthy eating, physical activity, tobacco control, and stress reduction at the individual, family, and community level.

Show people how to take greater control over their health.

Class/Learning Objectives: By the end of this session, students will be able to:

1. Define stress and depression
2. Discuss how stress and depression are treated
3. Identify the two main treatments for depression
4. Discuss the relationship of depression and stress to heart disease

Participants:

Instructor(s)

Students

Materials/Resources Needed:

Flipchart, markers, tape, blackboard, chalk and eraser

Handouts:

- 17-1 Signs of Depression
- 17-2 Look for Signs of Depression
- 17-3 Managing Stress
- 17-4 How Can I Manage Stress (AHA)

Class Outline

I. Overview

II. Lesson

- A. What is Stress?
- B. Can Stress be Diagnosed and Treated?
- C. What is Depression?
- D. What causes Depression?
- E. How is Depression Diagnosed?
- F. How is Depression Treated?
- G. What do Depression and Stress have to do with Heart Disease and Stroke?
- H. How Can I Manage Stress?

II. Summary

Plan for the Class:

I. Overview

We've discussed a number of risk factors for heart disease and stroke; physical conditions such as high blood pressure, high levels of blood cholesterol, diabetes, and personal behavior such as smoking, bad eating habits and lack of physical activity.

But this class is about Depression and Stress. What do these two things have to do with heart disease and stroke?

A number of recent studies indicate that there may be a connection between heart health and stress or depression.

If you sometimes feel depressed or have a lot of stress in your life, are you at a higher risk for heart disease and stroke?

Not necessarily, but managing stress and getting help for depression makes sense for your overall health and may decrease your risk for heart attack or stroke.

So what, exactly, does it mean when we hear of someone suffering from depression or being "stressed out?"

III. Lesson

A. What is stress?

Stress can mean many different things, but for our purposes, we will define stress as "mental tension" or feeling tense, anxious, or worried for long periods of time.

All people feel stressed, but they feel it in different amounts and react to it in different ways.

B. Can Stress be Diagnosed and Treated?

Stress is difficult to measure and because it is not considered an illness, it's not something that a doctor can diagnose using medical tests.

But stress can be as harmful to your health as some illnesses. And while we usually don't talk about treating stress – it is important to manage the stress in your life. Occasional stress is OK, but continuous stress can be deadly.

C. What is Depression?

Unlike stress, depression is an illness. It affects the way you eat and sleep, the way you feel about yourself, and the ability to function in everyday life.

It is not a sign of personal weakness or something that can be wished away. Without treatment, depression can last for weeks, months, or years.

D. What Causes Depression?

Depression may happen because of changes in your brain.

Depression sometimes runs in some families.

This means that someone in your family such as a grandparent, parent, aunt, uncle, cousin, sister or brother may have depression. Sometimes painful events or losses such as death can lead to depression.

Sometimes the cause of depression is not clear.

Medical problems such as stroke, a heart attack, and cancer can cause depression, making the sick person unwilling to care for himself or herself and unconcerned about the results.

Women experience depression about twice as often as men. Changes in the level of hormones may contribute to an increased rate of depression.

Although men are less likely to suffer from depression than women, three to four million men in the United States do suffer from depression. Men are less likely to admit to depression, and doctors are less likely to suspect it.

Depression typically shows up in men not as feeling hopeless and helpless, but as being irritable, angry, and discouraged: so, depression may be difficult to recognize as such in men.

E. How is Depression Diagnosed?

The first step in getting treatment for depression is a physical examination by a doctor. Certain medications and some illnesses such as a viral infection can cause the same symptoms as depression.

A doctor can rule out other possibilities with a complete examination and lab test.

If an illness is ruled out, a psychological evaluation should be done. The doctor may do this, but more likely, he or she will refer you to a psychiatrist or psychologist. A psychiatrist is a doctor with a medical

degree and can prescribe medicine. A psychologist has a degree in psychology from a college or university and cannot prescribe medicine.

A good evaluation will include a complete history of signs of depression: when they started, how long they have lasted, how severe they are, whether the patient had them before and, if so, what kind of treatment was given.

The doctor will ask about alcohol and drug use, and if the patient has thoughts about death or suicide.

And, the doctor will ask questions about family history, including whether other family members have had depression and, if treated, what treatment they may have received and which were effective.

F. How is Depression Treated?

There are two common types of treatment for depression:

- Medicine and
- "Talk" therapy.

Ask your doctor which type is better for you. Some people need both treatments to feel better.

Medicine

Medicines for depression are called "antidepressants." Your regular doctor or a psychiatrist (a medical doctor trained in helping people with depression) can prescribe them for you. Antidepressants may take a few weeks to work. Be sure to tell the doctor how you are feeling. If you are not feeling better, you may need to try different medicines to find out what works best for you.

Medicines sometimes cause unwanted "side effects." You may feel tired, have blurred vision, or feel sick to your stomach. Tell the doctor if you have these or any other side effects.

"Talk" therapy

"Talk" therapy involves talking to someone such as a psychologist, social worker, or counselor. It helps you learn to change how depression makes you think, feel, and act. Ask your doctor or psychiatrist who you should go to for talk therapy.

G. What do Depression and Stress have to do with Heart Disease and Stroke?

First, let's talk about depression. Depression can happen to anyone. However, we know from research that people with heart disease are more likely to suffer from depression than healthy people. And that people with depression have a greater risk for developing heart disease.

Also, people with heart disease who are depressed have a greater risk of dying after a heart attack compared to those who are not depressed.

Why do you think this happens?

Remember, depression can make it difficult to function in everyday life. It makes it difficult to care about taking medicine or to remember to take medicine. Making lifestyle changes such as increasing physical activity, healthy eating, and quitting smoking can seem impossible to someone suffering from depression.

Depression may affect your heart rhythm, increase blood pressure, and affect the bloods clotting ability. Depression can also lead to elevated blood sugar and blood cholesterol levels. These risk factors, with obesity, form a group of signs that often predict heart disease.

Despite the amount of research showing a link between depression and heart disease, depression often is not diagnosed and is not treated. Persons with heart disease, their families and friends, and even their doctors may not recognize depression's signs, mistaking them for the typical ill feelings that are a part of heart disease. Many signs of depression are similar to those of heart disease and other illnesses. However, doctors trained to recognize the signs of depression and to ask the right questions, can diagnose it, and suggest treatment or refer the person to another doctor.

Handout 17-1: Signs of Depression

CHWs can watch for signs of depression in people with heart disease and encourage them to get treatment. If they are helping a patient they should let the nurse or doctor know if they suspect depression.

How does stress affect someone with heart disease?

Often, when people in medical professions talk about the heart and stress, they are referring to physical stress. Physical stress or physical activity gives your heart a workout too. This is good if your heart is normal. But in people with heart disease blood flow to the heart is reduced during physical stress.

But now we are going to talk about a different kind of stress. Remember, we defined stress as "mental tension." But studies have shown that when people are subjected to mental stress or tension, blood flow to the heart can be reduced, just like it is for some people during physical stress.

People who have reduced blood flow to the heart during mental stress are more likely to have reduced blood flow to the heart during everyday activities and to have heart problems such as angina, repeat heart attacks, and to need heart surgery.

Note to Instructor: (may need to do a quick review of “angina”)

But there is good news. People do improve when they get help in reducing their levels of stress.

Handout 6-2: Look for Signs of Depression

CHWs can give this checklist to people with heart disease to help them identify depression in themselves.

H. How Can I Manage Stress?

Stress can be reduced by making lifestyle changes.

Keep a positive attitude. Focus on the positive things that happen in your everyday life. Take time to have fun and enjoy the simple things that make you happy. Take a walk on a sunny day and enjoy the birds, trees and flowers. Watch a funny TV show.

Accept that stress is a part of life. Make a list of things in life that cause you stress and then think about how serious each of the m really is. Pick out the things that are beyond your control, such as prices and the weather. Then, when you feel under stress, think about the cause. Is it something minor, or something you have no ability to control? If so, is the stress actually causing you more harm than the problem itself?

Clearly balance home and work responsibilities. To have a balanced life means deciding the most time and energy possible to what is most important to you. There is no set formula for living a balanced life. For example, some people find a 60 hour work week fulfilling, while others want to spend less time at work and more time with family or friends.

Manage time. Don't try to squeeze more work into a day than you can actually complete. Also, leave room for the unexpected. Take a mid-morning and afternoon break – you'll get more done.

Set realistic goals. When you think about setting goals, make sure that they are within your reach. Think about your finances, schedule, and other personal issues. Many people forget to think about these important factors and, as a result, they set unrealistic goals for themselves.

Learn to relax. Practice doing certain things slowly (eating or folding laundry). Sit back in a chair and concentrate on relaxing your muscles. If you find this difficult, try alternately tensing and relaxing, until you become familiar with the difference.

Eat an adequate and nutritious breakfast each day. Hunger can make people less able to cope with stress. Caffeine (coffee, tea, soft drinks, and some drugs) stimulate the nervous system and can cause nervousness and tension. Alcohol and drugs can be addictive and may reduce the ability to cope with stress. Physical activity reduces stress and contributes to a healthier heart, lungs, and arteries and will elevate your mood.

Activities and Handout 17-3: Managing Stress

No one can control all of life's challenges, but there are ways to cope with them. Ask CHWs how they deal with stress and their suggestions for helping community members reduce stress. Write their responses on a flipchart. Review the handout for 12 good suggestions for reducing stress.

Ask the CHWs what they think of each suggestion mentioned. Would these help people in their community? If not, what would be better? What are two things a person could do to regain balance in his or her life?

Handout 17-4: How Can I Manage Stress (AHA)

This handout from the American Heart Association can be given to people in the community to help them understand stress and how to handle it.

IV. Summary

- What is stress?
- What is Depression?
- What causes Depression?
- Why is it important for people with heart disease to be screened for depression?
- What are some methods for managing stress?

Resources:

Stress... at Work. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Public Health Service. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 99-101.

Depression and Heart Disease. National Institute of Mental Health. National Institutes of Health. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH Publication No. 02-5004. May 2002.

Depression Can Break Your Heart. National Institute of Mental Health. National Institutes of Health. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH Publication No. 01-4592. January 2001

Stories of Depression. Bethesda (MD): National Institute of Mental Health. National Institutes of Health. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; September 2002. NIH Publication No. 02-5084.