

Family History and Your Health

Family Health History and Depression

The holidays will soon be upon us. For many people the holidays are a joyful time to be spent with family. For others they bring added tension and stress that cause the “holiday blues”. For others still, depression can occur at any time of the year.

In the general population the lifetime risk* of major depression is 5-15%. This means that as many as 1 in every 7-20 people will experience depression at some time. For bi-polar disorder, also known as manic depression, the lifetime risk is 1%. This means that 1 of every 100 will be affected with the condition. Although the causes are complex and don't always follow a clear pattern, depression does tend to run in families.

- ◆ A first degree relative (parent, child or sibling) of a person with depression has a 3-5 times greater risk.
- ◆ Early age of onset (before 25-30 years of age) and recurrent episodes likely increases the risk to first degree relatives
- ◆ The child of a parent diagnosed with depression or bi-polar disorder has a 5-30% risk of developing depression or bi-polar disorder in their lifetime (or a 70-95% chance of NOT developing the condition).
- ◆ If parents, and at least one sibling are affected with either disorder, the lifetime risk for the other child is 50% for bi-polar disorder and 30-40% for major depression.

*Lifetime risk—The chance that someone will develop a condition in their lifetime.

For more information, please contact the Public Health Genomics Program by e-mail: genetics@michigan.gov or call toll-free: 1-866-852-1247



Did you Know?

This November marks the third annual Family Health History Initiative, started by former U.S Surgeon General. Dr. Richard Carmona, in 2004. Family health history is a risk factor for many chronic diseases and could hold clues to current and future health. To get started on your family health history today go www.hhs.gov/familyhistory. Knowledge is Power!

Where does Michigan stand?

Some health experts have estimated that by 2020, depression will be second only to heart disease in its economic impact on society. Of residents in Michigan in 2005, the most frequent mental health diagnosis was major depression.



Michigan Department
of Community Health



Jennifer M. Granholm, Governor
Janet Olszewski, Director



What Do We Know About Genetics and Depression?

In a nut shell— not much. Although no single ‘depression gene’ has been discovered, here is what we do know:

- ◆ There are multiple genes involved and a great deal more study needs to be done to increase understanding.
- ◆ Often genetic, psychological and environmental factors are involved in the onset of a depressive illness.
- ◆ Depression can run in families, suggesting that a genetic predisposition exists but additional factors, such as stresses at home, work, or school are involved in the onset.
- ◆ Other disorders are often seen within the family such as chronic alcoholism or eating disorders.
- ◆ Major depression is often associated with changes in brain structure or function.



The beginning is the most important part of the work.
— Plato

What Can You Do?



- **Know your family history** - Just because depression “runs in your family” doesn’t automatically mean it will happen to you. Be aware of the environmental and psychological factors that may have contributed to the onset in your relative. Note those on your family history.
- **Be aware of other triggers** - Stress, pregnancy, menstrual cycle, miscarriage, postpartum and menopause may trigger depression, especially if there is already a family history.
- **Know the signs of clinical depression**
 - ◆ Sadness
 - ◆ An inability to get pleasure from activities you used to enjoy
 - ◆ Difficulty concentrating
 - ◆ Low energy
 - ◆ Difficulty sleeping
 - ◆ Changes in appetite
 - ◆ Thoughts of suicide
- **Watch for depression in your loved ones with chronic illnesses** such as stroke, heart attack, cancer and others. The affected person may lose interest in caring for their physical needs making the recovery period from all the conditions longer and more difficult.
- **Seek help if you are living with violence, neglect, abuse or poverty.** These environmental factors increase the risk.
- **Get plenty of exercise and eat a healthy diet.** Physical health and mental health are very closely connected.

On the Web...

To find a Mental Health Agency in your area go to:



www.macmhb.org/
Click on Member Directory

University of Michigan Depression Center
www.med.umich.edu/depression/

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depression.cfm#ptdep1

United States Dept. Of Health and Human Services
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov/

National Crisis and Suicide Website
www.suicidehotlines.com/Michigan.html