Trying to Explain the Diabetes-Depression Link

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"Comorbid condition" is a phrase you don't want to hear if you're ill. For me, the primary illness is depression, but the list of potential comorbid conditions laid out in front of me--cardiovascular disease and cognitive problems being just a couple--can feel a bit like being in a cheesy horror movie. You know the guy or girl is going to die, you just don't know whether it's going to be an knife, an axe or a chain saw. For me, given my extensive history of depression, there is a growing body of literature suggesting that my risk of also developing diabetes is much higher than the average person. What no one really knows, however, is why this is the case.

In a recent editorial in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Constantine Lyketsos, MD, MHS, from Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center in Baltimore, lays out the possibilities and highlights the compelling findings of two other articles published in the same issue of the journal as the editorial:

"The findings from Zaragoza are important for three reasons. First, they provide a confirmatory estimate of the risk of diabetes attributable to depression (population attributable risk). That estimate of almost 7%, close to the 9% previously provided by Mezuk et al., indicates that depression may account for a significant fraction of diabetes incidence.

“Second, Campayo et al. show that the risk of diabetes extends to milder depressive syndromes in addition to major depression. Indeed, somewhat unexpectedly, less severe depression was associated with a higher risk of diabetes, compared to severe depression, perhaps because it was less likely to be treated.”

Is it the medications? There are hints that antidepressants might be at least partly to blame. Is it lifestyle? People who are depressed tend to be more sedentary. Is it high cholesterol due to a chronic overabundance of stress hormones? No one has yet proven that depression actually causes diabetes, but the link between the two is more than coincidence.

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