

ESC Clinical Consensus Statement on
**Mental Health and
Cardiovascular Disease:
What Patients
Need to Know**



What is a Clinical Consensus Statement?

Clinical Consensus Statements are documents created by healthcare professionals and scientists. They offer advice on diagnosis and treatment based on the latest available medical and scientific evidence to help ensure that patients receive the best possible care. They are primarily intended for doctors and medical staff.

How will this document help me?

This guide is based on the [European Society of Cardiology \(ESC\) Clinical Consensus Statement on Mental Health and Cardiovascular Disease](#) and is designed for patients and their families. It aims to help those affected by cardiovascular disease and/or mental health disorders.

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a general term for problems with the heart and blood vessels. It usually means that the heart or blood vessels are not working as well as they should, which can lead to serious health issues like heart attacks, strokes or heart failure.

There are several descriptions of the meaning of 'mental health.' This guide has chosen to use the explanation given by the World Health Organization: "Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well, work well and contribute to their community."

Mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety, can make it difficult to think, feel or behave normally, leading to distress and problems in daily life, such as at work or in relationships. In severe mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, the person's ability to perform daily activities is substantially affected.

This guide will show you:

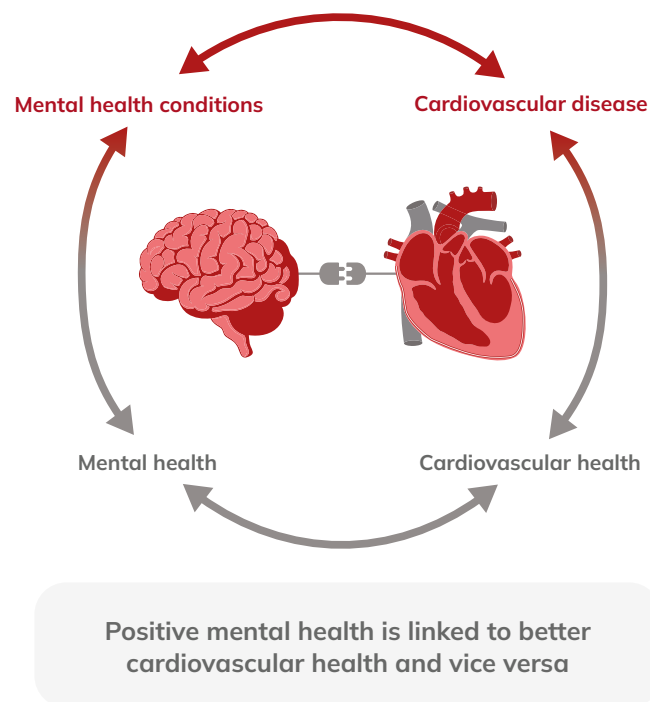
- The links between CVD and mental health
- The importance of this link for good health
- That effective treatment is possible for both conditions, singly or combined

Why focus on mental health conditions and cardiovascular disease?

There is good evidence that CVD can lead to mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety or stress, and vice versa. CVD and mental health conditions are often accompanied by feelings such as helplessness, fear and anger, and you may have worries about what the future holds for you and your family. Additionally, people with CVD and mental health conditions can struggle to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Mental health and mental health conditions interact with cardiovascular health and CVD in a multidirectional way:

- CVD affects mental health, worsening mental health conditions or causing new conditions
- CVD and mental health conditions can interact, worsening each other
- People with mental health conditions are more likely to develop CVD
- People with mental health conditions often face unkind or mistaken views from others
- People with mental health conditions or severe mental illnesses may not receive the same quality of CVD treatment as people without mental health conditions/illnesses
- Positive features of mental health are associated with better cardiovascular health



Positive mental health means feeling good about yourself, handling everyday stresses well and enjoying life. It's about having a sense of purpose, being able to form good relationships, coping with challenges and bouncing back when things go wrong. **Positive mental health is linked to better cardiovascular health.**

Just like physical health, **your mental health can be strong and healthy when you take care of it.**

The Psycho-Cardio team







If you have a CVD and/or mental health condition, you can benefit from integrated, person-centred care. The ESC has recommended the creation of [Psycho-Cardio teams](#) to improve the care of mental health conditions among people with CVD.

Psycho-Cardio teams are composed of multiple specialists (including nurses, doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists) who work together for the best cardiovascular and mental health care for patients.



The Psycho-Cardio team works with the patient and their caregivers to provide integrated care

It is recommended that the Psycho-Cardio team uses the ACTIVE principles to help improve mental health in cardiovascular care. Implementing person-centred practices involves a stepped care approach, where more treatment is given if your need increases.

- A**  **Acknowledge:** you and your healthcare provider should acknowledge (recognise or admit) that there are strong links between CVD and mental health
- C**  **Check:** your healthcare team (e.g. doctor, nurse, psychologist) should check regularly how you are feeling during your visits for cardiovascular problems
- T**  **Tools:** it is important that the right tools (checklists, questionnaires, etc.) are used to check your mental well-being. If you think that no tool has been used by your healthcare provider to assess your psychological status, then ask them
- I**  **Implement:** let us work together to make this happen. Sharing decisions and the stepped care approach are needed to put changes in place
- V**  **Venture:** joint mental and cardiovascular care is often not received. It is key that patients and professionals dare to change the system to make this happen
- E**  **Evaluate:** things can change, but changes need to be evaluated by you and your healthcare team to be sure that mental health care is changing for the better

How to work with your Psycho-Cardio team:

- Be open about your symptoms and feelings – voice your concerns
- Work with the team and inform them about what you need and like – this can ensure a good plan is made for your care
- Make notes about how you feel after any treatment changes – this can help pinpoint what works or does not work for you

Mental health conditions in people with cardiovascular disease

Mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety and stress, are more common [in people with CVD](#) than in the general population. If you have CVD, you may be at greater risk of developing a mental health condition, such as anxiety or depression.

Screening for mental health conditions is possible and important

Some mental health conditions [may be missed](#) when patients with CVD visit the doctor or hospital. The specialist may think that feelings like worry or fear are just a normal reaction to the CVD. These feelings might be normal at first, but if they last for a long time or get stronger, they can cause problems.

Screening for mental health conditions is one way to make sure that you get the help that you need. Screening usually means answering a few simple questions to work out how you are feeling and to check if you need a more detailed assessment or support from a specialist clinician.

If no one asks you about your feelings or emotions, please talk to your healthcare professional about how you feel.

Ask for support to find other sources of help

Even if screening turns out to be normal, it is important to know that support is available from other sources.

Psychological interventions are types of therapies that work on the mind and behaviour:

- Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is a type of talking therapy that helps you understand and change how you think and act. CBT can help you cope with the negative thoughts and behaviours that contribute to the mental health condition
- Psycho-education involves learning about your emotions, thoughts, behaviours and how your brain works. It can help you to better understand yourself and to cope with an illness, your sense of the future and your treatment
- Mindfulness-based techniques involve paying attention to the present moment. They can help you focus, calm down and stay grounded

Other psychological interventions like relaxation, cognitive techniques and emotional support can have positive effects. Ask your doctor about these if you think they might benefit you.

Social prescribing is where healthcare professionals connect patients with non-medical support in their community, for example, gardening, mindfulness or walking groups, to improve overall health and well-being. These may be different depending on where you live. Ask your healthcare professional if you think this type of approach may help you.

Lifestyle interventions including regular physical activity, a balanced diet, stress management techniques (e.g. yoga), adequate sleep and positive coping strategies can be very useful to overall good health and well-being if you have a CVD or a mental health condition. Avoiding unhealthy behaviours (such as smoking and excessive alcohol intake) is also important.

Sometimes medications may be needed to improve your mental health. Medications are discussed later.

Remember that CVD can get better

- Not all heart problems are permanent and many can be treated or well controlled
 - Some heart rhythm issues can be fixed with medication or procedures
 - Conditions like heart failure are often lifelong but can be managed with long-term care
- Regular tests help doctors check your CVD and ensure that treatment is adequate, so keep appointments when they are offered to you
- Play a key role in your care: ask questions about your CVD, understand your treatment and take medications as prescribed
- Remember that CVD can get better but your mental health may not change in parallel - it is important to keep talking to your healthcare team about your feelings

People with mental health conditions and severe mental illness

If a mental health condition substantially impairs a person's ability to carry out daily tasks and impacts employment and/or personal and social relationships, it is called a severe mental illness (SMI). SMIs include schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or major depression. Optimal results for most patients with SMI are obtained when treatment, including medications, psychotherapy and other forms of support, are combined, usually for some time.

How mental health conditions and SMI can affect your heart

If you have an SMI, you may also be at greater risk of heart disease. This can happen because SMI can lead to low energy or motivation, a lack of exercise, smoking, poor diet and increased weight gain. Depending on their severity, mental health conditions can make it harder to stick to healthy habits (e.g. quitting smoking and taking medicines). SMI can also make it difficult to manage at work or cope with family life, which can lead to stressful financial and social difficulties.

Some medications, especially for SMI, can increase the risk of heart disease by raising blood sugar and cholesterol, causing weight gain or affecting heart rhythm.

Knowing this link helps you and your doctors prevent heart problems early.

Managing mental health conditions and SMI helps to protect your heart

Good mental health care = better heart health. Taking care of your mental health is one of the best ways to protect your heart. You can achieve this by taking your prescribed treatment and attending regular check-ups. Managing SMI makes it easier to maintain a healthy lifestyle, exercise, eat well and quit smoking.

Teamwork between psychiatrists, cardiologists and GPs is key. Ask the Psycho-Cardio team to assist you to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Monitoring and routine checks of blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol and body weight can help detect issues early.

Risks for heart health (with SMI)



Low energy and motivation → harder to exercise



Difficulty quitting smoking



Poor diet and unhealthy eating habits



Weight gain (from lifestyle or medication)



Some psychiatric medications may also raise blood sugar and cholesterol or affect heart rhythm



Financial and social difficulties

Ways to protect your heart



Stick to your mental health treatment plan



Good mental health makes it easier to stay active and follow a heart-healthy lifestyle



Develop healthy habits (exercise, diet, quit smoking)



Regular check-ups with your doctors



Teamwork between psychiatrists, cardiologists and GPs



Monitor and manage heart risks

Treating heart disease is the same for everyone

If you have any mental health conditions and then develop CVD, you have the right to the same high-quality care as anyone else. Common treatments include heart medications and procedures (e.g. stents or pacemakers). Tell your doctors about your mental health history and medications because some heart and mental health drugs can interact and your care team may need to make adjustments. Speak openly with your healthcare providers – they are there to help you manage both mind and body.

Check if your medicines are heart friendly

The main medication groups used in the treatment of mental health conditions and SMI are shown below.

Medication class	When used
Antidepressants	To treat mental health conditions, such as mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders or anxiety disorders
Mood stabilisers	To stabilise mood in the treatment of bipolar disorder and sometimes, major depression
Antipsychotics	To treat psychotic symptoms and stabilise mood in disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, and sometimes, major depression
Anxiolytics/sedatives	Temporarily used to reduce anxiety until antidepressants have started to work. These drugs are often overused (given too often without checking if they are really needed or if they should be stopped)
Hypnotics	Temporarily used to treat insomnia and sleep disorder when not part of other disorders

Sticking to your medication improves your CVD. However, it is important to understand that:

- Some antipsychotic medications can affect your heart or metabolism, for example, olanzapine, clozapine and quetiapine may cause weight gain, diabetes and increased cholesterol levels, which all contribute to heart conditions
- Some antidepressants may cause blood pressure changes or problems with your heart rhythm. However, newer types of antidepressants are usually safer for the heart
- Benzodiazepines (for anxiety/sleep) should be used with caution and temporarily (short term), especially in older adults
- Smoking affects how medications work – tell your doctor if you smoke or have recently quit
- Don't stop any medication without advice. Instead, talk to your doctor about alternatives or ways to reduce side effects

The importance of carers and caring for carers

Caring for someone with CVD, mental health problems or both is a big responsibility. It can be rewarding, but also hard.

How CVD and mental health affects carers and families

When someone you love has CVD or a mental health condition, it not only affects them – it affects you too. You may feel worried, tired or sad. Sometimes, you might feel alone or stressed. Studies show that carers of people with CVD or mental health problems often feel more anxious and depressed than those who are not carers.

Caring for someone with both CVD and mental health issues can be even more challenging. You may have to help the person with medicine, doctor visits and emotional support. This can make you feel overwhelmed or exhausted.

Carers sometimes do not get the help they need

Sometimes the healthcare system focuses only on the person who is ill and forgets about the carer's needs. Carers may not ask for help because they feel guilty or they might not know where to turn. You might need help with:

- Money (like paying household bills or travel to the hospital)
- Social isolation (feeling lonely or left out)
- Emotions (feeling sad, anxious, stressed or overwhelmed)
- Mental health (dealing with depression or anxiety)

It is important to remember that your needs matter too.

Taking care of yourself is important

Looking after yourself is not selfish. It is necessary for the health of both you and the person you care for. If you are healthy, you can give better support to your loved one. Some ways to care for yourself:

- Take breaks: Even a short walk or a few minutes to yourself can help
- Eat well and sleep enough: Your body needs energy and rest
- Talk to someone: Share your feelings with friends, family or a professional
- Do things you enjoy: Read, listen to music or spend time on hobbies

Remember, screening for mental health conditions, like anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is important. If you feel that your mental health is suffering, talk to a healthcare professional. Looking after your mental health can help you care better for your loved one.

Talking to your healthcare professional

You should feel comfortable talking to your doctor or nurse about your worries – not just about the person you care for but about yourself too. Healthcare professionals have tools to help carers. They can:

- Give advice on managing stress
- Help you find support groups or counselling
- Sometimes provide information about medical, financial or social help

Other sources of help

You are not alone. There are many places and people who can help you:

- Support groups – meeting others in similar situations can make you feel less alone and provide strategies to help you cope
- Charities – many charities offer advice, support and financial guidance
- Community or religious groups – these groups can provide friendship and practical help
- Counselling services – talking to a counsellor can help you manage stress and emotions

Ask your healthcare professional for a list of local resources or look online for groups in your area.

Healthcare professionals should:



Listen – informal caregivers must be heard as they are an invaluable source of information and often experience much distress



Reassure – caregivers should be reassured that they are not alone and that their emotional responses are both valid and important



Assist – caregivers need assistance to acquire new knowledge, organise information, follow management instructions and implement lifestyle changes



Encourage – caregivers should be encouraged to access relevant medical and social support, both for the patient and for themselves



Refer – caregivers should be referred to relevant services to support their health and social needs

Conclusions

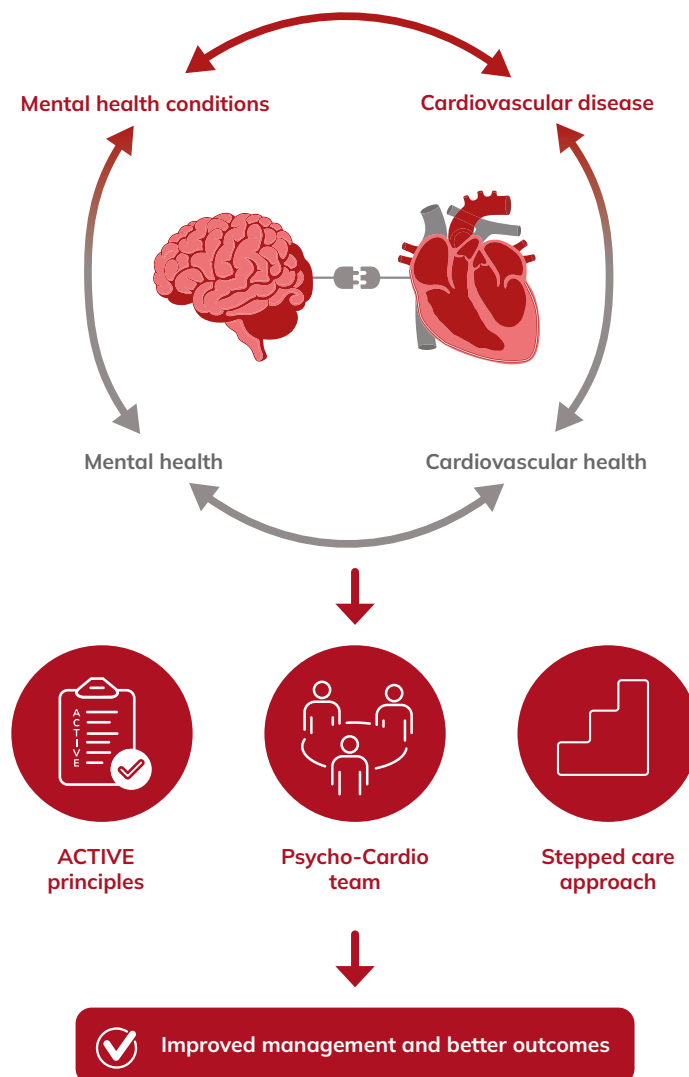
CVD and mental health conditions are common – they can also increase the risks or worsen each other.

It is important that your healthcare professional assesses both your mental health and cardiovascular health status to see if you need help. If they do not ask about your emotions, prompt them or talk to them about your feelings.

Integrated care – different professionals in the Psycho-Cardio team working together with you – is the best way for managing CVD and mental health conditions, with care stepped up or down as needed. The ACTIVE principles can help the Psycho-Cardio team deliver effective integrated care.

Not all mental health conditions or heart conditions are permanent, but some are. Optimal care might involve medicines, but other techniques, such as mindfulness training or cognitive behavioural therapies, work too.

Both CVD and mental health conditions can have an impact on carers or family members and it is important that they receive support if needed.



This guide for patients is a simplified version of the [2025 ESC Clinical Consensus Statement on mental health and cardiovascular disease](#).

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Disclaimer

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