

# Belief in a caring god improves response to medical treatment for depression

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Research suggests that religious belief can help protect against symptoms of depression, but a study at Rush University Medical Center goes one step further.

In patients diagnosed with [clinical depression](#), belief in a concerned God can improve response to medical treatment, according to a paper in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*.

A total of 136 adults diagnosed with [major depression](#) or bipolar depression at inpatient and outpatient [psychiatric care](#) facilities in Chicago participated in the study. The patients were surveyed shortly after admission for treatment and eight weeks later, using the Beck Depression Inventory, the Beck Hopelessness Scale, and the Religious Well-Being Scale - all standard instruments in the social sciences for assessing intensity, severity and depth of disease and feelings of hopelessness and spiritual satisfaction.

Response to medication, defined as a 50-percent reduction in symptoms, can vary in psychiatric patients. Some may not respond at all. But the study found that those with strong beliefs in a personal and concerned God were more likely to experience an improvement. Specifically, participants who scored in the top third of the Religious Well-Being Scale were 75-percent more likely to get better with [medical treatment](#) for clinical depression.

The researchers tested whether the explanation for the improved

response was linked instead to the feeling of hope, which is typically a feature of [religious belief](#). But degree of hopefulness, measured by feelings and expectations for the future and degree of motivation, did not predict whether a patient fared better on anti-depressants.

"In our study, the positive response to medication had little to do with the feeling of hope that typically accompanies spiritual belief," said Patricia Murphy, PhD, a chaplain at Rush and an assistant professor of religion, health and human values at Rush University. "It was tied specifically to the belief that a Supreme Being cared."

"For people diagnosed with clinical depression, medication certainly plays an important role in reducing symptoms," Murphy said. "But when treating persons diagnosed with depression, clinicians need to be aware of the role of religion in their patients' lives. It is an important resource in planning their care."

Provided by Rush University Medical Center

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