

World first online treatment helps depression and heart disease

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(Medical Xpress)—University of Sydney researchers have found a 40 percent improvement in the mental health of people with both depression and cardiovascular disease after using e-couch - a free online program that helps depression or anxiety sufferers regain control of mood to improve their lives.

Published today in *Plos One*, the study found e-couch to be more effective at improving the health of people with both depression and cardiovascular disease than providing health and [lifestyle advice](#).

The study of 562 participants compared the health outcomes of people who used e-couch, with those who used an equivalent online program that delivered healthy lifestyle information about depression, nutrition, physical activity, blood pressure and cholesterol and [heart health](#).

The participants who used e-couch improved by 40 percent, compared to those just given health information. Participants were also 40 percent less likely to be depressed after using the program.

There were similar improvements in anxiety and people reporting sticking with a medication and [healthy lifestyle](#).

Paper lead author, Professor Nick Glozier, from the University's Brain and Mind Research Institute (BMRI), said the findings had a far-reaching impact, with more 8000 people using the online program every month nationally.

"We saw that using e-couch gave a greater improvement in people's mood and anxiety," he said.

"Interestingly, those who used e-couch also showed better adherence to medical treatments and some improvements in their lifestyle."

E-couch comprises 12 modules of psychoeducation, [cognitive behaviour therapy](#), and interpersonal psychotherapy techniques that have been shown to be effective against depression in younger people without other health problems.

"In high income countries like Australia, cardiovascular disease and depression are the two leading causes of disease burden," Professor Glozier said.

"Depression is more common in people who have cardiovascular disease, and can prevent people from regaining their health.

"Evidence suggests that people with both depression and cardiovascular disease have poorer [health outcomes](#) because they are less likely to follow medical treatments and exercise less.

"Our study shows that for people with mild to moderate depression and physical health problems, online interventions targeting mood problems are more effective at improving psychological health and some aspects of physical health than health and lifestyle advice alone."

More information: www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0059139

Provided by University of Sydney

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