

# Fourfold increase in likelihood of anxiety or depression treatment if your partner has already done so

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A study led by a team at Keele University has found that when one partner of a couple consults their GP about depression or anxiety, the other partner is much more likely to do the same.

Common mood disorders like [anxiety](#) and depression are a major priority for healthcare, with an estimated 12 percent of NHS funding (£11.7 billion) spent on [mental health](#) services in 2014-15. This new study highlights the importance of considering patients' household contexts as an influence on their mental health.

A [primary care](#) medical database of consultation records was used for the study and a total of 13,507 couples aged 30 to 74 years were identified. Results show a fourfold increase in the likelihood of a person consulting a doctor about depression if their partner already has, and a threefold increase in likelihood of doing so for anxiety.

The research, which was conducted along with colleagues at Newcastle University and published in *BMC Psychiatry*, raises important questions about why there are connections between partners consulting their GP about anxiety and depression. The research team give some potential explanations for these findings. It may be that the mood of people we spend time with has an effect on ourselves (a phenomenon described as "affective contagion"), or it might be that our partner talking to their GP or getting treatment prompts us to do the same when we notice changes

in our own mood, or it might be that events such as bereavement in our family lead to joint changes in mood for both ourselves and our partner.

Professor Athula Sumathipala, Professor of Psychiatry at Keele University, said: "This study shows that there is a significant and substantial increase in the chances of you consulting for depression or anxiety if your [partner](#) has also consulted for the same condition. Understanding more about the reasons behind this association will be important in shaping new approaches to mental health at individual, family and societal levels".

Professor Michael Moore, Professor of Primary Health Care Research within Medicine at the University of Southampton, commented: "As GPs, we regularly come into contact with members of the same couple or family. The results of this study emphasise how valuable a wider contextual perspective can be when discussing mental health and treatment with patients".

Professor Barbara Hanratty, Professor of Primary Care and Public Health at Newcastle University, said: "The public health burden of mental health conditions is growing and we know that social circumstances are one of the most important determinants of [health](#). This study suggests that there may be potential benefits in taking a household level approach to treatment for common [mental health conditions](#)."

Provided by Keele University

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