



Healthy matters to keep in mind.

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Dealing with Depression What It Is and How It Affects People's Lives

Clinical depression is one of the most common mental illnesses, affecting more than 19 million Americans each year.¹ It can cause people to lose pleasure from daily life, complicate other medical conditions and be serious enough to lead to suicide. It can occur in anyone, at any age, and to people of any race or ethnic group.

Although about 70 percent of people with depression have a full remission with effective treatment, less than half of those suffering from this illness actually seek treatment.² There are excellent treatments and medications available so it is important to seek help when necessary. This article discusses types, causes and signs of depression as well as the value of support groups.

Types of Depression

There are several forms of depressive disorders³.

Major depression: severe symptoms that interfere with the ability to work, sleep, study, eat, and enjoy life. An episode can occur only once or many times in a person's lifetime.

Persistent depressive disorder: depressed mood with symptoms that last for at least two years.

Psychotic depression: severe depression plus some form of psychosis, such as delusions or hallucinations.

Postpartum depression: more serious than the "baby blues" that many women experience after giving birth, when hormonal and physical changes are overwhelming.

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD): the onset of depression during the winter months, when there is less natural sunlight.

Bipolar disorder: not as common as major depression or persistent depressive disorder; characterized by cycling mood changes—from extreme highs (mania) to extreme lows (depression).

Causes of Clinical Depression

Many things can contribute to clinical depression. There may be several factors involved, or just one. People can also become depressed for no apparent reason. Usually, depression is caused by a combination of factors⁴:

Biological: people have too little or too many brain chemicals (neurotransmitters).

Cognitive: people with negative thinking patterns and low self-esteem.

Environmental: stress caused by the multiple responsibilities of today's fast-paced life.

Medications: side effects of some medications can bring about depression.

Genetic: a family history of clinical depression increases the risk of getting the illness.

Situational: difficult life events (e.g., divorce, financial problems or death of a loved one).

Co-occurrence: more likely to occur with other illnesses like heart disease or cancer.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

Everyone gets "the blues" from time to time. But if it makes it tough to function and just getting through the day is overwhelming, you may be dealing with clinical depression.

If you notice five or more of these symptoms for two weeks or more, it could be a sign of depression and time to see a doctor or qualified mental health professional.⁷

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" feelings
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- Irritability and restlessness
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable, including sex
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details and making decisions
- Insomnia or sleeping too much or sleeping too little
- Overeating or appetite loss
- Thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- Physical problems (e.g., aches, pains, headaches) that do not ease with treatment

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Differences in Depression Between Men and Woman

Men and women often experience depression differently. While women are more likely to have feelings of sadness, worthlessness and excessive guilt, men are more likely to be very tired, irritable, lose interest in once-pleasurable activities and have difficulty sleeping. Women are 70 percent more likely than men to experience depression during their lifetime. Although more women attempt suicide, many more men die by suicide.⁵

Women face unique biological and hormonal causes of depression, including premenstrual problems, pregnancy and infertility, postpartum depression, menopause and other health problems. Men may be more likely to deny their feelings or hide them from others. Sometimes depression in men shows up as physical symptoms, such as backaches, frequent headaches, sleep problems, sexual dysfunction, digestive disorders, irritability, rage and violence.⁶

Diagnosis and Treatment

Clinical depression is very treatable. The first step is to visit a doctor or mental health specialist to discuss any family history of depression or other mental disorder and get a complete history of your symptoms. Your doctor may ask about thoughts of suicide or use of alcohol or drugs since mood disorders and substance abuse commonly occur together.

The most common treatments are antidepressant medication, psychotherapy or a combination. The choice of treatment depends on the pattern, severity, persistence of symptoms, and illness history. Early treatment is more effective and helps prevent the likelihood of serious recurrences.

The Value of Support Groups

The millions of Americans coping with mood disorders (including depression) and their families can benefit immensely from the support of other people who have been in a similar situation.⁸

After proper diagnosis and treatment by a trained professional, support groups can help people suffering from depression:

- Reach out to others and benefit from the experience of those who have “been there”
- Give and receive advice on how to cope
- Have a forum for mutual acceptance, understanding and self-discovery
- Reduce the sense of isolation
- Stay motivated to follow their wellness plans
- Realize mood disorders do not define who they are
- Rediscover strengths and humor they may have thought they had lost
- Experience sharing and caring that is crucial for a lifetime of wellness

Support groups are not a substitute for professional care. But they can provide the opportunity for people to bond with new and accepting friends, and to find role models who can inspire faith that recovery is possible.

Look for a support group in your area. Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional about support group options. If finding, or getting to, a support group near you is difficult, look online. There are many resources available to assist in your efforts to make support groups a helpful part of your depression treatment plan.

Resources

Western University

Call us toll-free: (800) 234-5465
TDD/TTY Dial 711 and enter the number above.

or log on to
www.liveandworkwell.com
access code: westernu

Under the BeWell section, click on Depression to access self-help programs, resources, videos, forums and comprehensive information. You can also search for a clinician by clicking on the Search for Clinician tool.

The information, advice, treatments and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for informational and educational purposes only. Consult with your doctor or mental health provider for specific health care needs, treatment or medications. Certain treatments may not be covered under your benefit, so check with your health plan regarding your coverage of services. We do not recommend or endorse any treatment, medication, suggested approach, specific or otherwise, nor any organization, entity, or resource material that may be named herein. Except for Liveandworkwell.com, no other site identified herein is affiliated or controlled by us. You will be subject to the terms of use, privacy terms and policies of any site you may visit.

¹ National Institute of Mental Health, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>. Accessed June 2015.

² Ibid, National Institute of Mental Health.

³ Ibid, National Institute of Mental Health.

⁴ Ibid, National Institute of Mental Health.

⁵ Ibid, National Institute of Mental Health.

⁶ Helpguide.org, <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/depression-in-men.htm>. Accessed June 2015.

⁷ National Institute of Mental Health. “What Is Depression?” <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>, Accessed June 2015.

⁸ Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, “How Support Groups Help,”

http://www.dbsalliance.org/site/PageServer?pagename=wellness_support_groups. Accessed June 2015.

