

Depression

Depression is a serious illness. It is very different from the common experience of feeling grief, being miserable or getting fed up for a short period of time.

When an individual is depressed, he or she may have feelings of extreme sadness that can last for a long time. These feelings are severe enough to interfere with a person's daily life, and can last for weeks or months, rather than days. A wide range of symptoms characterizes it. Common symptoms include inability to see a future, loss of weight and general aches and pains.

Cause

There are many different factors that can trigger depression. For some people, upsetting or stressful life events, such as bereavement, divorce, illness, and job or money worries, can be the cause. This is often known as reactive depression, where depression is a reaction to the event. In other cases, depression does not have an obvious cause.

Other causes of depression include:

- A family history of depression
- Drinking excess alcohol
- Using recreational drugs
- Some types of prescription medication

Frequency of Occurrence

About 15 percent of people will have a bout of severe depression at some point in their lives. However, the exact number of people with depression is hard to estimate because many people do not get help, or are not formally diagnosed with the condition.

Women are twice as likely to suffer from depression as men, although men are far more likely to commit suicide. This may be because men are more reluctant to seek help for depression.

Depression can affect people of any age, including children. Studies have shown that 2 percent of teenagers in the UK are affected by depression.

Signs and Symptoms

An individual who is depressed often loses interest in things once enjoyed. Depression commonly interferes with work, social and family life.

Psychological Symptoms:

- Continuous low mood or sadness
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Low self-esteem
- Tearfulness
- Feelings of guilt
- Feeling irritable and intolerant of others
- Lack of motivation and little interest in things
- Difficulty making decisions
- Lack of enjoyment
- Suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming someone else
- Feeling anxious or worried
- Reduced sex drive

Physical Symptoms:

- Slowed movement or speech
- Change in appetite or weight
- Constipation
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Lack of energy or lack of interest in sex
- Changes to the menstrual cycle
- Disturbed sleep patterns

Social Symptoms:

- Not performing well at work
- Taking part in fewer social activities and avoiding contact with friends
- Reduced hobbies and interests
- Difficulties in home and family life

Diagnosing the Disease

Visit a GP if it is thought that an individual has depression. The GP may do a physical examination and blood or urine tests to rule out other conditions that have similar symptoms, such as underactive thyroid.

There are no clinical tests for depression, so detailed interviews and questionnaires are usually used to make a diagnosis.

Treatment

Treatment for depression usually involves a combination of drugs, talk therapies and self help. Counseling is beneficial as part of a general treatment plan for depression and can be obtained through a GP or privately. Most get treatment from their GP and make a good recovery.

Treatment depends on the severity of the symptoms, and may include one or a combination of the following:

- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
- Interpersonal therapy (IPT)
- Counseling
- Antidepressants
- Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)
- Lithium

Prevention

To deal with depression, and help prevent repeated bouts of depression:

- Take medicines regularly as directed
- Discuss reducing or stopping medication with a GP before making any changes
- Gradually try to increase enjoyable activities
- Avoid smoking, illegal drugs and alcohol
- Use a problem-solving approach to deal with stress and worry
- Identify negative thoughts and change them to positive thoughts
- Assess symptoms regularly and consult a GP or counsellor if problems arise
- Increase exercise
- Learn how to relax using relaxation exercises and tapes
- Practice yoga, meditation or have a massage to help relieve tension and anxiety
- Join a self-help group and discuss feelings and concerns
- Eat a healthy diet which includes omega-3 fatty acids and protein

Contact us anytime for confidential assistance.