

Depression

“Gentle words bring life and health: griping brings discouragement.” (Proverbs 15:4)

Depression is a real medical problem which can be treated, but first it must be recognized. Depression affects the way a person eats, sleeps, and how they think or feel about their lives. True depression is not something you can overcome by “bucking up” or thinking happy thoughts. It is a serious condition that influences a person’s ability to cope with everyday living.

It is estimated that about 14 million people in the United States suffer from depression in any given year. Women suffer from depression at about twice the rate of men. This may be related to hormones, child birth, or the overwhelming responsibilities that many women carry by working and caring for their families. While depression is not genetic, it can tend to run in families.

Depression in men can be harder to identify. It is not uncommon for men to hide the signs of depression with the use of drugs or alcohol. Instead of the classic signs most people associate with depression, men may display anger, irritability, or discouragement.

Depression can also affect children and the elderly. It is important that these symptoms not be ignored, because untreated depression can lead to the traumatic loss of ones job, family and friends, or even a life.

Everyone feels sad, or down, at times. There is a difference between being sad during an especially unhappy or difficult time in our life, and being clinically depressed. Most of us have experienced bleak times when we couldn’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. This type of depression is miserable, but temporary, because it has a cause that we can identify. Clinical depression has no identifiable cause or explanation. It is a condition that is long term and serious. The causes are not well understood, but may be related to a chemical imbalance or genetic factors. Help is available with psychotherapy and anti-depressant medications. Depression can affect anyone regardless of age.

It can strike anybody, at any age. The following list is a very straightforward way to check for signs of depression. Anyone with five or more of these symptoms, lasting two weeks or more, should see a health care professional. Anyone with thoughts of suicide at any time must seek help immediately.

- Feelings of sadness and/or irritability
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities previously enjoyed
- Changes in weight and appetite
- Feelings of guilt, hopelessness, or worthlessness
- Inability to concentrate, remember things, or make decisions
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Restlessness or decreased activity noticed by others
- Frequent thoughts of death
- Insomnia or over sleeping

Diagnosis is not made on the presence of these symptoms alone. A doctor will need to take a full medical history, and rule out a physical cause for them. Some medications, and even certain viral infections, can cause the symptoms of depression.

Treatment usually consists of anti-depressant medications and psychotherapy. For anyone who has attempted, or even thought about, harming themselves, inpatient treatment is usually required to protect the patient until the depression begins to lift. Recovery does not happen overnight. It is a long process, usually taking weeks or even months to see a real improvement.

The most important role of family or friends is to see that the depressed person seek treatment. The sufferer also needs emotional support in the form of listening, encouragement, and patience.

Good sources of information:

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression>

www.depression.com