



Depression

Feeling sad at times is part of life for most people, especially when there are life problems and stress. However, for someone with depression, this sadness makes it difficult to perform daily functions.

While a depressed mood is usually referred to (and perceived) as negative, it can sometimes be subtly beneficial in helping a person adapt to circumstance. However, the experience of depression, or feeling "down," often results in physical inertia, which leads to the compulsion to rest.

Depression is one of the most common health conditions in the world. Depression isn't a weakness, nor is it something that an individual can simply "snap out of." Depression, formally called major depression, major depressive disorder or clinical depression, is a medical illness that involves the mind and body. It affects how an individual thinks and behaves and can cause a variety of emotional and physical problems. The individual may not be able to go about their usual daily activities, and depression may make one feel as if life is hopeless.

Effective diagnosis and treatment can help reduce even severe depression symptoms. With effective treatment, most people with depression feel better, often within weeks, and can return to the daily activities they previously enjoyed.

Symptoms of Depression

The symptoms of depression include:

- Loss of interest in normal daily activities
- Feeling sad or down
- Feeling hopeless
- Crying spells for no apparent reason
- Problems sleeping
- Trouble focusing or concentrating
- Difficulty making decisions
- Unintentional weight gain or loss
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Being easily annoyed

- Feeling fatigued or weak
- Feeling worthless
- Loss of interest in sex
- Thoughts of suicide or suicidal behaviour
- Unexplained physical problems, such as back pain or headaches.

Depression symptoms can vary greatly because different people experience depression in different ways. A 25-year-old man with depression may not have the same symptoms as a 70-year-old man, for instance. For some people, depression symptoms are so severe that it's obvious something isn't right. Others may feel generally miserable or unhappy without really knowing why.

Causes of Depression

It's not known specifically what causes depression. As with many mental illnesses, it's thought that a variety of biochemical, genetic and environmental factors may cause depression.

Biochemical Factors

Some evidence from high-tech imaging studies indicates that individuals with depression have physical changes in their brains. The naturally occurring brain chemicals called neurotransmitters, which are linked to mood, also may play a role in depression. Hormonal imbalances have also been said to have an impact on the emergence of depression.

Genetic Factors

Studies show that depression is more common in people whose biological family members also have the condition.

Environmental Factors

The environment is also thought to play a causal role in the development of depression. Environmental causes include events such as loss, stress, or even financial problems.

Risk Factors

Although precise statistics aren't known, depression is considered relatively common. Approximately 10%-25% of women and 5%-12% of men are said to suffer from depression at one point in their lives. Depression typically begins in the late 20s, but it can arise at any age, affecting everyone from young children to older adults.

Although the precise cause of depression isn't known, researchers have identified certain factors that seem to increase the risk of developing or triggering depression, including:

- Having other biological relatives with depression
- Having family members who have taken their own life
- Stressful life events, such as the death of a loved one
- Having a depressed mood as a young child or adolescent

- Illness, such as cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's or HIV/AIDS
- Long-term use of certain medications:
- High blood pressure medication
- Sleeping pills
- Birth control pills.
- Certain personality traits:
 - Low self-esteem,
 - Being overly dependent, self-critical or pessimistic
 - Alcohol, nicotine and drug abuse
 - Having recently given birth
 - Being in a lower socioeconomic group.

When to Seek Medical Advice

It's perfectly normal to occasionally feel sad or upset, or to be unhappy with situations in one's life. With depression, however, these feelings linger for weeks, months or even years. These feelings also are much more intense than "just the blues" and can interfere with relationships, work and daily activities, and even your ability to eat and bathe.

Feelings of depression can also lead to suicide. Depression usually doesn't get better on its' own, and it may even get worse if left untreated. If symptoms of depression are experienced, it is advisable to seek professional assistance from a therapist/doctor/counsellor.