



Christian Counseling

Equipping People for Life...

DEPRESSION

Symptoms of Depression

- *Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood*
- *Sleeping too little or too much*
- *Changes in weight or appetite*
- *Loss of pleasure or interest in activities*
- *Feeling restless or irritable*
- *Persistent physical symptoms that don’t respond to treatment*
- *Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions*
- *Fatigue or loss of energy*
- *Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless*
- *Thoughts of suicide or death*

How does depression differ from occasional sadness?

Everyone feels sad or “blue” on occasion. Most people grieve over upsetting life experiences. These feelings of grief tend to become less intense on their own as time goes on. Depression occurs when feelings of extreme sadness or despair last for at least two weeks or longer and when they interfere with activities of daily living -- such as working, or even eating and sleeping. Depressed individuals tend to feel helpless and hopeless, and to blame themselves for having these feelings. Some may have thoughts of death or suicide. People who are depressed may become overwhelmed and exhausted and stop participating in certain everyday activities altogether. They may withdraw from family and friends.

What causes depression?

Changes in the body’s chemistry influence mood and thought processes, and biological factors contribute to some cases of depression. With many individuals, however, depression signals first and foremost that certain mental and emotional aspects of a person’s life are out of balance. Significant transitions and major life stressors such as the death of a loved one or the loss of a job can bring about depression. The causes of depression are not always immediately apparent, so the disorder requires careful evaluation and diagnosis by a trained mental health care professional. People who have a family history of depression might show symptoms of depression in their own lives. Although anyone can become depressed at any age, studies show that men and women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s are most often affected by this disorder.

Women, in general, seem to suffer depression more often than men. In fact, recent studies suggest that because of factors that include being victims of abuse, living in poverty, or fulfilling multiple social roles (e.g., homemaker, employee, spouse), women are twice as likely to have an episode of depression.

Can depression be treated successfully?

Absolutely. Depression is highly treatable when an individual receives competent care. Unfortunately, feelings of depression often are viewed as a sign of weakness rather than as a signal that something is out of balance. The fact is that people with depression cannot simply “snap out of it” and feel better spontaneously. Persons with depression who do not seek help

suffer needlessly. Unexpressed feelings and concerns accompanied by a sense of isolation can worsen a depression. The importance of obtaining quality professional health care cannot be overemphasized.

Are their different types of depression?

Yes. Initial symptoms of Major Depression may not always seem significant, (see the list on the front of this handout). Yet without relief, the individual will eventually experience emotional pain and misery, and impairment in productivity at work and home and in relationships with family and friends.

Sometimes the episodes appear seasonally — typically with depression occurring in fall and winter and diminishing in the spring. Women seem to be especially prone to this kind of depression, known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

Manic-Depressive Illness, also called bipolar disorder, involves cycles similar to major depression alternating with inappropriate “highs.” Unlike other depressions, women and men are equally vulnerable. During manic episodes, people become overly active, euphoric, irritable, talkative and may spend money irresponsibly and get involved in sexual misadventures.

Dysthymia involves symptoms similar to those of major depression. They are milder but longer lasting, with a minimum duration of two years. People with dysthymia are frequently lacking in zest and enthusiasm for life, living a joyless and fatigued existence that seems an almost natural outgrowth of their personalities. If, in addition, they have a major depressive episode, as often happens, they are sometimes referred to as having “double depression.”

Development of Depression

The higher incidence of depression in females begins in adolescence. The added stresses of adolescence include forming an identity, confronting sexuality, separating from parents, and making decisions for the first time. These significant issues are generally different for boys and girls. Studies show that female high school students have significantly higher rates of depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and adjustment disorders than male students, who have higher rates of disruptive behavior disorders.

For both adult men and women, rates of major depression are highest among the separated and divorced, and lowest among the married, while remaining always higher for women than men. The quality of a marriage, however, may contribute significantly to depression. Lack of an intimate, confiding relationship, as well as marital disputes, have been shown to be related to depression in married women.

How does counseling/therapy help people recover from depression?

Counseling offers people the opportunity to identify the factors that contribute to their depression and to deal with the psychological, behavioral, interpersonal, and situational causes. Having one episode of depression greatly increases the risk of having another episode. Through counseling/therapy people can learn skills to avoid unnecessary suffering from later bouts of depression.

The support and involvement of family and friends can play a crucial role in helping someone who is depressed. Living with a depressed person can be very difficult and stressful on family members and friends. Counseling/therapy can provide a good opportunity for individuals to learn more about depression and to identify constructive ways of supporting a loved one who is suffering from depression.

Depression can seriously impair a person’s ability to function in everyday situations. The prospects for recovery for depressed individuals who seek appropriate professional care are very good. By working with a qualified and experienced mental care professional, those suffering from depression can regain control of their lives.

Excerpted from *just the facts*, How Psychotherapy Helps People Recover From Depression,

A Publication of the American Psychological Association Practice Directorate