

ARE YOU DEPRESSED??

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We all have off days. Those times when we feel grumpy, sluggish and oversensitive. The times when we don't feel like working or can't muster up interest in the things we usually enjoy doing. When we feel down about something or about nothing in particular.

However when those off days add up and you find yourself feeling increasingly unhappy, unmotivated, de-energized and negative about life, you may have to wonder if you are clinically depressed.

Depression like most things ranges from mild, to moderate and severe. If your depression is mild it is likely that you will still be going to work, carrying on with many of your daily "must do's" but that you don't feel like doing them and avoid things when you can. Social relationships become labour intensive when you are depressed ie they feel like a lot of work rather than bringing the usual enjoyment.

Common features of depression are difficulties with sleeping, loss or increase of appetite and loss of sex drive.

When depressed you are likely to feel negative about yourself, your future, others, the world and also about the possibility of anything improving. It is also likely that your confidence and self esteem will be down.

If you tend to have a low self esteem normally it will be worse with you only noticing your deficits. If you usually have a realistic view of the world and can appreciate yourself, it is likely that you will find this slipping.

The less you are able to do or feel like doing the things that should be routine, the worse you will feel about yourself.

We often associate depression with a loss of energy and lethargy. However depression can also be experienced in a more agitated way where you can't settle down and are easily irritated.

Another typical symptom of depression is a loss of a sense of meaning in life, where everything seems pointless.

Memory tends to be poor. It is often the first sign of depression in the elderly but affects people of all age groups. It is usually concentration that is the problem, which affects memory.

These concentration problems can also extend to not being able to read a book – either not being able to settle down with it when you are usually able to, or by the end of the page not remembering what you were reading. Even TV can sometimes be an irritation and you might find yourself unable to sit through a program.

When it starts to become more severe you will feel a sense of hopelessness about your situation and a sense of helplessness." *I don't know how to feel better, there is no point in trying and nothing I am doing is helping anyway.*" This can feel overwhelming. At this point you may feel suicidal or even attempt suicide.

Others in your life will not always understand why you are not who you usually are and why you have changed. You are unlikely to be great company or a pleasure to spend time with and they may lose patience with you.

In children, depression does not always have the same symptom picture as it does with adults. Children are not able to put into words how they are feeling and often we have to observe it in changes in their behaviour.

Summary

The most obvious symptoms of depression are:-

- Depressed mood for most of the day
- Loss of pleasure in activities and life.
- Variations of the symptoms described above

Diagnosis of Depression

Because many of the symptoms of depression are found in other conditions, it is important to get a definite diagnosis.

It is important to get a proper diagnosis as this informs what treatment will be appropriate for you, just as being diagnosed with any physical condition is the first step to getting the right treatment.

Depression also presents itself differently in children, adults and the elderly.

Depression does not always have to occur alone. Anxiety problems often co- exist.

When depression is part of bipolar disorder (formerly known as manic depressive disorder) the symptom picture is also different.

Treatment

Depression can be self limiting. That is, it can become better without any intervention. This is more likely to be :-

- where there is a definite cause i.e if there has been a change/life crisis
- if there is no prior history of depression
- if you have good coping skills
- if you have a good support system.

Sometimes however, depression needs treatment to prevent it from becoming worse and to help you to feel better, more energized, to get a sense of meaning in life, and to preserve your important relationships and work.

There are different forms of treatments and therapies that are used for depression. How you will be treated will all depend on the treatment plan that is put together for you and what kind of framework you prefer.