

DEPRESSION

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

DESCRIPTION

A continuing feeling of sadness, despondency or hopelessness. Major depression occurs in about 1 in 10 Americans. It affects both sexes, but is more common in women. It can be difficult to treat, but there is continued improvement in effectiveness of treatment.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Loss of interest in life; boredom
- Listlessness and fatigue
- Insomnia; excessive or disturbed sleeping
- Social isolation
- Appetite loss or overeating
- Loss of sex drive
- Difficulty making decisions
- Difficulty concentrating
- Unexplained crying bouts
- Intense guilt feelings over minor or imaginary misdeeds
- Irritability
- Various pains, such as headache or chest pain, without evidence of disease

CAUSES

A truly depressive illness has no single obvious cause. Some biological factors can play a part, e.g., physical illness, hormonal disorders, certain drugs. Social and psychological factors can play a part. Inherited disorders may contribute (manic-depression runs in families). May relate to the number of disturbing events in a person's life.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Unexpressed anger or other emotion
- Compulsive, rigid, perfectionist or highly dependent personalities
- Family history of depression
- Alcoholism
- Failure in occupation, marriage or other interpersonal relationships
- Death or loss of a loved one
- Loss of something important (job, home, investments)
- Job change or move to a new area

- Surgery, such as mastectomy for cancer.
- Major illness or disability.
- Passing from one life stage to another, such as menopause or retirement.
- Use of some drugs, such as reserpine, beta-adrenergic blockers or benzodiazepines.
- Withdrawal from mood-altering drugs, such as narcotics, amphetamines, or caffeine.
- Some diseases, including diabetes mellitus, cancer of the pancreas and hormonal abnormalities.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Maintain good communication with family and close friends. Raise children with love and reasonable expectations in school and home. Anticipate and prepare for major life changes where possible.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Spontaneous recovery in many cases, but professional help can shorten the duration and help you learn to cope in the future. Recurrence is common. The recovery rate is high, despite one's pessimism while depressed.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Suicide warning signs include:

- Withdrawal from family and friends.
- Neglect of personal appearance.
- Mention of wanting "to end it all" or being "a burden to others."
- Evidence of a suicide plan (e.g. buying or cleaning a gun).
- Sudden cheerfulness after prolonged despondency.

Hallucinations or psychotic behavior. Manic behavior, characterized by inappropriate over activity and comic or irresponsible behavior.

Student Health Center



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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.

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GENERAL MEASURES

Psychotherapy or counseling along with drug treatment appears to obtain the best results. (Many different types of psychotherapy are available ranging from simple problem-solving type to behavioral therapy to psychoanalysis). Hospitalization or inpatient at special treatment center may be required for severe depression. Seek support groups. Contact social agencies for help if you feel suicidal. Electroconvulsive therapy (use of electric shocks to produce a seizure) used in severe cases; is effective and safe and may be life-saving.

MEDICATION

Antidepressant drugs for some persons with prolonged or moderately severe depression. Anti-anxiety drugs may be prescribed. Sedatives may be prescribed temporarily for insomnia.

ACTIVITY

No restrictions. Maintain daily activities and interests even if you do not feel like it. Attend social functions, concerts, athletic events, plays and movies. Keep in touch with friends and loved ones. Engage in regular, strenuous exercise. This helps relieve depression.

DIET

Eat a normal, well-balanced diet even if you have no appetite. Vitamin and mineral supplements may be necessary. Some medications may require that you not consume alcoholic beverages.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

You have symptoms of depression.
You feel suicidal or hopeless.

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