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# ◆ DEPRESSION ◆

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## Understanding depression

**W**hat comes to mind when you hear the word “depression?” The blues? A lack of motivation? Paralyzing lethargy? “Depression” has become such a common catch phrase that it suggests anything from a bad day to a gloomy period to a significant medical disorder.

Making the distinction between feeling down and experiencing an actual clinical (or medical) depression can help in choosing a course of action for feeling well again.

Clinical depression is a whole body illness. Unlike having “the blues,” a depressive illness affects the way we eat and sleep, and colors the way we feel about ourselves. It is not a passing blue mood, nor is it a sign of personal weakness that can be willed away. People with a depressive illness cannot merely “pull themselves together.” Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, even months. The good news is that appropriate treatment can help most of those who suffer from depression.

Depressive illness seems to run in families, and a family history of depression does predispose an individual to the illness. However, many people with a family history of depression never become depressed. In other instances, people with no family history of the illness can become depressed and seek treatment. Stress is the major factor for triggering depression, and the illness strikes hardest at people experiencing extreme stress. Under these circumstances, the body sometimes goes into a “system shutdown” and depression ensues.

Current treatments for a depressive illness include medication and talk therapy with a mental health professional. Most experts agree that a combination of these two types of treatment is the best course for ensuring a stable recovery. Scientists have recently developed medications that can address the symptoms of a depressive illness very specifically and have few long-lasting side effects. Talking with a counselor or therapist can lead to new and better ways of dealing with stress and to adopting a more positive view of things.

Depressive illnesses cause feelings of exhaustion, helplessness and hopelessness. These thoughts and feelings can make some people feel like giving up. During a depressive illness, it is important to realize that these negative views are part of the illness and may not accurately reflect the situation. Negative thinking begins to fade as treatment takes effect. Some of the strategies professionals use with depressed clients are listed below, and they can easily be adopted as coping skills for anyone feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

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### Helping Yourself:

- Break down large tasks into smaller, more manageable “chunks” and set comfortable, realistic goals for accomplishing them.
- Give yourself a break. Expecting too much from yourself only increases feelings of failure.
- Try to be with people you like as much as possible - too much alone time can make negative thoughts swell.
- Participate in activities that have made you feel good in the past, especially exercise. Even mild exercise can work as a mood elevator.
- Avoid major life decisions until things seem clearer.
- Treat yourself with patience and kindness. Blaming yourself for not being up to par doesn't help.
- Remember, negative thinking is part of being depressed. Your outlook will improve as you take care of yourself and get well.

## We can help with...depression

Many times, clients can resolve their problems with depression by talking with a CONCERN counselor. Some people may benefit from a referral for longer-term therapy or a medication evaluation.

Many clients report that making the decision to seek help is the most difficult part of dealing with coping with depression. Some may wonder whether their problem is serious enough to warrant counseling. Others may fear the counselor will think they are “crazy” or “stupid” for feeling depressed. Whatever the source of hesitation, seeking help at an early stage is a wise decision. Anyone who is experiencing depression symptoms can benefit from counseling. CONCERN counselors understand how difficult it is to take the first step in seeking help and are sensitive to the self-conscious feelings associated with counseling.

The counseling process involves three stages: appointment setting, assessment, and the “working” stage. At the appointment setting stage, a convenient time and appropriate location, as well as, the counselor are determined. In assessment, the counselor listens to the problems that a person is having, with the goal of understanding their problem. The counselor will ask clarifying questions about health status, relationships, and the use of alcohol and/or drugs. This information helps the counselor get a clearer idea of the scope of the problem, and it gives an indication of what the goals of the counseling will be. Sometimes, feelings of depression are related to adjustment to a change. Many people experience these feelings in response to a loss such as the end of a relationship, leaving a job, or the death of a loved one. Others may have more long-term issues, including a low self esteem. In any case, CONCERN is a good place to start in solving the problem. In the “working” stage, the counselor and the client meet regularly to discuss progress in achieving counseling goals. People often need help in setting realistic goals and expectations. With the assistance of a trained professional, the individual's issues will be clarified and discussed to the point of resolution.

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