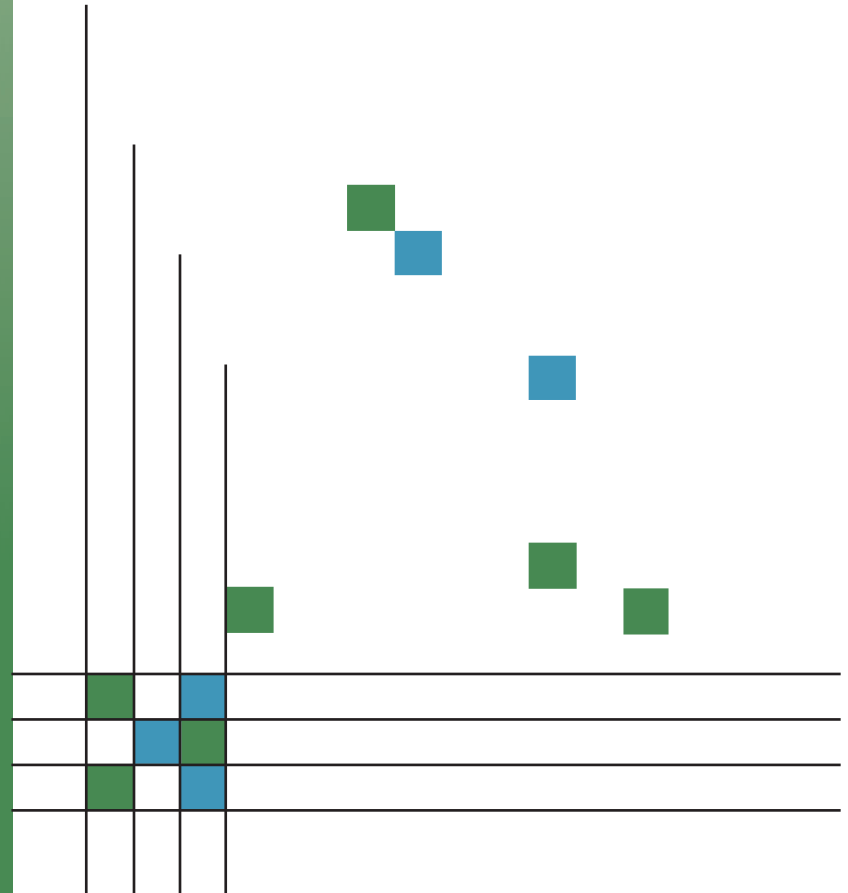


This handout is part of a Self-Help Information Series written by the Kirkwood Community College Counselors, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. 319-398-5471 or 1-800-332-2055, ext. 5471.

Please share this information with family, friends and classmates.

Depression



Depression

Getting Help Will Help

Most everyone experiences depression at one time or another. Sadness, loneliness, hopelessness and disappointment are all feelings that can create emotional disturbances which can bring about depression. The loss of a loved one, a broken relationship, being isolated or separated from any group support, financial or health problems, a lack of academic or personal success, and low self-esteem or self-motivation are examples of situations which can result in a depressive disorder.

With the onset of depression and the often accompanying feelings of lack of enthusiasm and just not caring, individuals may enter a period of general withdrawal. They may isolate themselves from family, friends, and people in general. They may refuse to participate in their normal activities and become complacent and just sit around. The individual may feel fatigued yet be unable to sleep for any extended period of time, usually only two or three hours. Physical aches and pains may be experienced, and nausea and lack of appetite are not uncommon. Any actual enjoyment of life is absent, and feelings of anxiety, guilt, and worthlessness are prevalent.

When experiencing depression, any responsibilities which are a part of the individual's life may become impossible burdens. Academic assignments, for example, can be mind boggling, since the person has a diminished ability to think and concentrate. Reading comprehension declines, and tasks such as note taking can be impaired. This process of continual failure and inability to complete tasks results in additional stress and tension for the depressed person. The hole becomes deeper for the individual and the depression becomes more severe.

Where to Get Help

- A Kirkwood Community College Counselor (319-398-5471) or Campus Health Nurse (319-398-5588) can offer support and make a referral if necessary
- Family Physicians
- Hospitals
- Abbe Center for Community Mental Health (319-398-3562)
- Family Service Agencies
- Marriage and Family Therapists
- Foundation 2 Crisis Hotline (Call 24 hours/day 319-362-2174, 1-800-332-4224)
- Depression/Anxiety Support Groups

Depression does not have to ruin lives. You can take action. If you or someone you know has symptoms of depression, see a health care professional and talk things over with an understanding friend, teacher, counselor, or co-worker. Depression is common and it can be treated. Getting help will help.

Treating Depression

As with most illnesses, treatment is easiest and most effective when it's begun early.

A combination of methods is often used:

Medication

A variety of medications (called antidepressants) can help relieve the symptoms of depression and return a person to normal functioning.

Counseling and Therapy

Talking things over with a professional can help people become more self-aware and better able to cope with their problems.

Paying for Treatment

Insurance often covers the cost. Free samples of medications can be obtained from a physician, and some agencies have sliding-fee scales for counseling services. Whatever the cost, it is small compared to the suffering and problems that may result from prolonged, untreated depression.

Common Symptoms

Although the range of symptoms which may be experienced by a depressed individual is very broad, there are some fairly common and general signs to look for:

- Feelings of sadness and hopelessness
- Emotional flatness or emptiness
- Low self-esteem or self-guilt
- Inability to concentrate and poor memory
- Irritability
- Neglect of appearance
- Insomnia and difficulty getting out of bed
- Lack of appetite and usually loss of weight
- Chronic fatigue
- Loss of interest and pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Suicidal thoughts
- General weakness and decreased energy

Obviously, everyone has experienced one or more of these symptoms at various times, but the length of time the symptom persists and the severity of the symptom is what determines the level of depression.

What Causes Depression?

Depression is often caused by a combination of factors. Chemical imbalances in the brain, stressful life events, and a family history of depression can all contribute to the illness. Certain medications and medical conditions can cause a person to feel depressed, as can use of alcohol or other drugs. Depression can also occur for no apparent reason at all!

Are You Depressed?

Take this simple quiz to find out. For each question, consider how you have felt for at least two weeks and give yourself points as follows:

0 = None, or little of the time 1 = Some of the time
2 = Most of the time 3 = All of the time

1. I feel sad and lonely. _____
2. I have difficulty concentrating. _____
3. My appetite or weight has changed. _____
4. I have frequent crying spells. _____
5. I am restless. _____
6. I've lost interest in doing things. _____
7. My energy level has decreased. _____
8. People annoy and irritate me. _____
9. I have difficulty sleeping. _____
10. I think about committing suicide.* _____

*(If you answered "1, 2 or 3" to question 10, please seek professional help immediately.)

How to Score the Quiz

Add up your numbers for all 10 questions. If your score is 12 or higher, you need to seek a professional evaluation for depression. Even if you do not score that high, but still suspect you are depressed, seek professional help. Depression is not a sign of weakness. It is a disorder that responds very well to various treatments. Seeking help is the first step toward recovery and feeling better.

The Common Types of Depressions

Major Depression

This type is characterized by symptoms that:

- Begin suddenly, possibly triggered by a loss, crisis or change
- Are so severe that they interfere with normal functioning
- Continue for months or years if not treated

It's possible for a person to have only one episode of major depression. However, it's more common for the episodes to repeat several times during the person's life or to be long lasting.

Dysthymia

People with this illness experience a chronic state of mild depression — they feel "down" much of the time. They may function fairly well on a daily basis, but over time their work and relationships suffer. Fortunately, dysthymia can be successfully treated.

Bipolar Disorder

This is also called "manic depressive illness." The person alternates between periods of depression and periods of mania* (a frantic "high"). The mood changes can be sudden, but are usually gradual.

*Symptoms of mania include:

- Insomnia
- Overconfidence
- Racing thoughts
- "Wild" behavior
- Greatly increased energy

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

This is depression that may result from changes in the season. Most cases begin in fall and winter. Professional treatment is necessary for all these types of depression.