

Facts about DEPRESSION

What is depression?

Depression is an illness that results from chemical imbalances in the brain. This abnormal chemistry causes the brain to work improperly and results in the symptoms of depression.

Depression can affect people of all ages, including children, although it most often affects persons between the ages of 25 and 40. Both men and women suffer from depression; however, more women than men are diagnosed and treated. Depression can occur regardless of social or economic status.

Poor parenting does not cause depression, nor is it a sign of weakness or a personality defect.

What are the symptoms?

People who suffer from depression may experience any or all of the following symptoms:

- overwhelming sadness
- feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness
- inability to enjoy life
- difficulty thinking clearly and making decisions
- anxiety and worry
- disturbances in sleep and appetite
- extreme physical fatigue
- suicidal feelings

Stressful life events such as divorce or the death of a loved one can bring on depression. In addition, certain chemicals such as alcohol or illegal drugs can trigger depression or make it worse.

Can depression be treated?

Depression can be successfully treated in about 80 percent of people. It may not go away on its own. Asking for professional help is not a sign of weakness.

The most successful approach to the treatment of depression is a combination of anti-depressant medication and counseling.

Anti-depressant medications work by altering the action and distribution of brain chemicals so that the brain can function normally.

These medications are usually most effective in improving symptoms such as sleeping, eating and energy problems. Anti-depressant medications do not alter a person's personality or solve all of life's problems.

Recovery from depression also involves counseling and psychiatric rehabilitation services. These services help individuals understand and accept the illness, learn ways to cope with the symptoms. The individual also learns skills that will allow him/her to function successfully.

Consumer self-help and family support groups also play an important role in recovery from depression.

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