

depression

Depression is a normal human emotion. Everyone feels depressed at some point in time, but it is when the depression is severe or occurs for a number of weeks or months that it is diagnosed as an illness or a disorder.

Depression is common and affects about 1 in 20 people in Australia. Depression is manageable though and sufferers should seek professional help. Unfortunately many people feel ashamed or embarrassed about their illness and so talk about it very little.

Depression can affect the body as well as the mind. It can trigger mood swings, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, a decrease in the ability to cope with life and a feeling of worthlessness and withdrawal from social interaction. Physically depression can dampen appetite, energy levels and sex drive. It can also cause constipation, continual tiredness, crying, dry mouth, headaches, indigestion and weight loss or gain. Those with severe depression can experience delusions and hallucinations. In some cases depression can be fatal, with about 15% of severely depressed patients committing suicide.



Cause

There can be a variety of factors that contribute to depression. The tendency to develop depression can run in the family. Often people diagnosed with depression have experienced other emotional illnesses such as anxiety, excessive worry or drug and alcohol problems, before progressing to a depressed state. Most depressive episodes are triggered by a personal event such as loss of a loved one, divorce, childbirth, financial difficulty etc. Physical illnesses such as low thyroid function, brain injury/disease, major illness or chronic pain can also be a cause of depression. In some cases depression can arise for no apparent reason.

Symptoms

There can be a wide variety of symptoms associated with depression. Some of these can be:

- Persistent sadness and pessimism
- Feelings of guilt
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Poor appetite associated with loss or gain of weight
- Fatigue, lack of energy
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Thoughts of suicide or death
- Loss of interest and enjoyment in nearly every aspect of life

Treatment

Seeking the help of a healthcare professional is an important step in fighting depression. Various methods of help can be used. Psychotherapy is very common as it involves learning how to change the way we think and behave. Changes can be made through modifying activities, challenging thoughts and exploring feelings to help recovery and prevent relapse. In some cases antidepressant medication is required to balance chemical messengers in the brain (these involve the neurotransmitters serotonin, noradrenaline and dopamine). Antidepressants are commonly given long term to prevent recurrences. There are also lifestyle factors to consider, such as:

Exercise is a valuable addition to treatment. During exercise chemicals called endorphins are released and have the effect of raising your mood. Research has shown that over several months, regular exercise is able to significantly improve the symptoms of depression.

Diet is an easy area to neglect when depressed. It is at these times that the bodies requirements for vitamins and minerals increase, so the importance of a balanced diet full of fresh fruit and vegetables and the avoidance of sugar, caffeine, fried and processed foods is necessary.

The course that depression will take will vary from person to person. There is generally a cure rate of about 8 in 10 people once treatment starts. Yet the disorder can recur in about half of those who are treated.

References: http://www.blackmores.com.au/conditons/conditions_detail_print.asp?cond=1
<http://www.healthnetwork.com.au/search-display.php?print=1&cat=condition>