

DEPRESSION FACT SHEET

Life is full of good times and bad, of happiness and sorrow. But when you are feeling "down" for more than a few weeks or you have difficulty functioning in daily life, you may be suffering from a common, yet serious medical illness called clinical depression.

Anyone Can Have Clinical Depression

Every year more than 17 million Americans suffer from clinical depression. Young or old, man or woman, regardless of race or income-anyone can experience clinical depression. Depression can cause people to lose the pleasure from daily life, can complicate other medical conditions and can even be serious enough to lead to suicide. However, this suffering is unnecessary. Clinical depression is a very treatable medical illness. So why don't many people seek the help they need?

Clinical depression often goes untreated because people don't recognize the many symptoms. They may know some symptoms, such as sadness and withdrawal, but are unaware of others including anxiety, irritability and sleeplessness. Some incorrectly believe that only people whose depression lasts for months, or who have completely lost their ability to function, have "real" or "clinical" depression.

Many people wrongly think that depression is "normal" for older people, young adults, new mothers, menopausal women, or those with a chronic illness. The truth is clinical depression is never "normal," no matter what your age or life situation.

Depression is Not Grief

It is normal to feel sadness after the death of a friend or family member. Indeed, most of us experience great sadness at times in our lives, perhaps from a divorce, moving away from family and friends, losing a job, even losing our good health due to illness. But, most people cope with these losses without becoming clinically depressed. If the sadness or depressed mood continues for a long period of time, the person may be experiencing clinical depression, and should seek professional help.

You Cannot Treat Clinical Depression on Your Own

Some people are embarrassed to get help for depression or they are reluctant to talk about how they are feeling. Others believe that depression will just go away on its own, and that they should just "tough it out." Such views are simply wrong; like any other serious illness, clinical depression requires professional treatment. Talking to friends, family members and clergy can often give people the support needed when going through life's difficult times. However, for those with clinical depression, such support is no substitute for the care of a health professional. Remember that clinical depression is a serious illness that you cannot treat on your own.

You May Need to Help Your Loved One

People with clinical depression often do not have the motivation or energy to seek treatment. This means that it is very important that friends and family help. The best way to express concern when someone is depressed is by guiding the depressed person to seek treatment. Depression can even cause confusion and withdrawal. Therefore, it may be helpful for family or a friend to accompany the depressed person to the initial health professional's evaluation, to ask questions and note instructions.

Learning to Recognize Clinical Depression

Does this sound like you?

"For weeks. I was always on the verge of tears. I thought I had fallen into a black hole that I couldn't get out of. Was I going to feel this way forever? "

"Even though I was always tired, I kept waking up early in the morning. I completely lost my appetite and everyone irritated me, people at work, my husband and kids."

"My family and friends noticed that I just wasn't "myself" anymore. I didn't enjoy the things I use to: playing go/j going out, even having sex. It became so difficult to concentrate at work that I felt worthless, like I couldn't do anything well."

Not everyone experiences clinical depression in the same way. Different people have different symptoms.

Clinical Depression is One of the Most Treatable Illnesses

Clinical depression is very treatable and getting treatment can save lives. In fact, more than 80 percent of people with depression can be treated successfully with medication, psychotherapy or a combination of both. Only qualified health or mental health professionals can diagnose if someone has clinical depression. As with many illnesses, if treatment is needed, the earlier it begins, the more effective it can be. Early treatment increases the likelihood of preventing serious recurrences.

Help for Clinical Depression

How do I get help for clinical depression? The first step is to talk to your doctor. Bring in your checklist and explain the symptoms you have been experiencing. He or she may recommend a physical checkup to find out if there is any underlying physical cause for the depressive symptoms. If clinical depression is diagnosed, your physician, EAP or health maintenance organization may make referrals to a mental health specialist.

Mental health professionals include psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors and social workers. Psychiatrists can prescribe antidepressant drugs because they are physicians. Mental health professionals, who are not physicians, can provide psychotherapy and

often work with psychiatrists and family physicians to ensure that their patients receive medications they may need.

Making the Most of Your Treatment

Make treatment a partnership. Treatment is a partnership between the person with clinical depression and their health care provider. Be sure to discuss treatment options and voice your concerns with your doctor or therapist. Become informed; ask questions and demand answers.

Continue your treatment. Don't stop taking your antidepressant medication too soon or without your doctor's knowledge.

Carefully follow your doctor's instructions to be sure you take the proper dose. Inform your doctor about any side-effects.

Change your treatment or get a second opinion. Treatment changes may be necessary if there is no improvement after six to eight weeks of treatment, or if symptoms worsen. Trying another treatment approach, another medication, or getting a second opinion from another health care professional may be appropriate.

Join a depression support group. In addition to treatment, participation in a support group can also be very helpful during the recovery process. Support group members share their experience with the illness, discuss coping skills and exchange information on community providers.

Take care of yourself. Take good care of yourself during treatment for clinical depression. Be sure to get plenty of rest, sunshine, exercise and eat nutritious, well-balanced meals. Reducing the stress in your life will also help. Many people find strength and support through their religious and spiritual affiliations. Share this flier with your family and friends and ask for extra support and understanding.

You can enjoy your life again! With recognition and treatment, clinical depression can be overcome.

Fact sheet courtesy of Valeo Behavioral Health Care - Topeka, Kansas