



Depression: Causes and prevention

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Introduction: Now-a-days the word depression is becoming the talk of the town. People can be seen talking and discussing this topic which was considered a taboo in near past. Although a shift in the attitude of the people may be noticed but it is not that widely accepted still.

Depression is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects the way one feels, the way one thinks and acts. Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease a person’s ability to function at work and at home.

Although every age group is susceptible but unfortunately the youth of today is falling prey to depression due to continuous societal pressures, heavy workloads and unrealistic desires from life. Therefore, it is extremely necessary to understand depression with its causes and preventive measures.

Depression symptoms can vary from mild to severe and can include:

- Feeling sad or having a gloomy mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Changes in appetite associated with weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue
- Increase in purposeless physical activity (e.g., hand-wringing or pacing) or slowed movements and speech (actions observable by others)
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide.

Difference in depression and

sadness:

The death of a loved one, loss of a job or the ending of a relationship are difficult experiences for a person to endure. It is normal for feelings of sadness or grief to develop in response to such situations. Those experiencing loss often might describe themselves as being “depressed.”

But being sad is not the same as having depression.

Grief or sadness	Depression
In grief painful feelings come in waves, often intermixed with positive feelings and energies.	In depression mood and/or interest (pleasure) are decreased for most of two weeks.
Self-esteem is usually maintained.	Feelings of worthlessness and self-loathing are common.
The grief is less severe and one overcomes it in due course of time, naturally.	The depression is more severe and lasts longer than grief without depression.

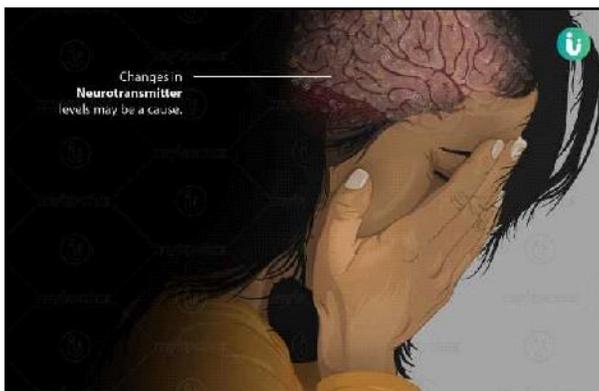
The grieving process is natural and unique to each individual and shares some of the same features of depression. Both grief and depression may involve intense sadness and withdrawal from usual activities but they are also different in important ways:

Risk factors for depression:

Biochemistry: Differences in certain chemicals in the brain may contribute to symptoms of depression.

Genetics: Depression can run in families. For example, if one identical twin has depression, the other has a 70 per cent chance of having the illness sometime in life.

Personality: People with low



self-esteem, who are easily overwhelmed by stress, or who are generally pessimistic appear to be more likely to experience depression.

Environmental factors: Continuous exposure to violence, neglect, abuse or poverty may make some people more vulnerable to depression.

Treatment of depression: Before a diagnosis or treatment, a health professional should conduct a thorough diagnostic evaluation, including an interview and possibly a physical examination. In some cases, a blood test might be done to make sure the depression is not due to a medical condition like a thyroid problem. The evaluation is to identify specific symptoms, medical and family history, cultural factors and environmental factors to arrive at a diagnosis and plan a course of action.

Medication: Brain chemistry may contribute to an individual's depression and may factor into their treatment. For this reason, antidepressants might be prescribed to help modify one's brain chemistry. These medications are not sedatives, "uppers" or tranquilizers. They are not habit-forming. Generally antidepressant medications have no stimulating effect on people not experiencing depression.

Psychotherapy: Psychotherapy, or "talk therapy," is sometimes used alone for treatment of mild depression; for moderate to severe depression, psychotherapy is often used in along with antidepressant medications. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has been found to be effective in treating depression. CBT is a form of therapy focused on the present and problem solving. CBT helps a person to recognize distorted thinking and then change behaviours and thinking. Psychotherapy may involve only the individual, but it can include others. For example, family or couples therapy can help address issues within these close relationships. Group therapy involves people with similar illnesses.

Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT): This is a medical treatment most commonly used for patients with severe major depression or bipolar disorder who have not responded to other treatments. It involves a brief electrical stimulation of the brain while the patient is under anesthesia. ECT has been used since the 1940s, and many years of research have led to major improvements. It is usually managed by a team of trained medical professionals including a psychiatrist, an anesthesiologist and a nurse or physician assistant.

Self-help and coping: There are a number of things people can do to help reduce the symptoms of depression. For many people, regular exercise helps create positive feeling and improve mood. Getting enough quality sleep on a regular basis, eating a healthy diet and avoiding alcohol (a depressant) can also help reduce symptoms of depression.

Conclusion: Depression is a real illness and help is available. With proper diagnosis and treatment, the vast majority of people with depression will overcome it. If you are experiencing symptoms of depression, a first step is to see your family physician or psychiatrist. Talk about your concerns and request a thorough evaluation. This is a start to addressing mental health needs.

Mental health is as important as physical health. Addressing the need of help in mental health should be considered as normal as in case of physical health. We need to make joint efforts towards creating awareness about depression and try to build the courage of all those who want to seek help. We are in immense requirement to come together as a society so that the taboos about mental health and depression could be broken.

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