

# Depression: What You Need to Know

## Clinical Depression is a common, real and treatable illness.

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### Basic Facts About Clinical Depression:

- Clinical depression is one of the most common mental illnesses, affecting more than 19 million Americans each year.<sup>[1]</sup> This includes major depressive disorder, manic depression and dysthymia, a milder, longer-lasting form of depression.
- Depression causes people to lose pleasure from daily life, can complicate other medical conditions, and can even be serious enough to lead to suicide.
- Depression can occur to anyone, at any age, and to people of any race or ethnic group. Depression is never a "normal" part of life, no matter what your age, gender or health situation.
- Unfortunately, although about 70% of individuals with depression have a full remission of the disorder with effective treatment, fewer than half of those suffering from this illness seek treatment.<sup>[2]</sup> Too many people resist treatment because they believe depression isn't serious, that they can treat it themselves or that it is a personal weakness rather than a serious medical illness.



### Treatments for Clinical Depression:

Clinical depression is very treatable, with more than 80% of those who seek treatment showing improvement.<sup>[3]</sup> The most commonly used treatments are antidepressant medication, psychotherapy or a combination of the two. The choice of treatment depends on the pattern, severity, persistence of depressive symptoms and the history of the illness. As with many illnesses, early treatment is more effective and helps prevent the likelihood of serious recurrences. Depression must be treated by a physician or qualified mental health professional.

### Symptoms of Clinical Depression:

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- Sleeping too much or too little, middle of the night or early morning waking
- Reduced appetite and weight loss, or increased appetite and weight gain
- Loss of pleasure and interest in activities once enjoyed, including sex
- Restlessness, irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment (such as chronic pain or digestive disorders)
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless
- Thoughts of suicide or death

If you have five or more of these symptoms for two weeks or more, you could have clinical depression and should see your doctor or a qualified mental health professional for help.

## Causes of Clinical Depression:

Many things can contribute to clinical depression. For some people, a number of factors seem to be involved, while for others a single factor can cause the illness. Oftentimes, people become depressed for no apparent reason.

- Biological - People with depression typically have too little or too much of certain brain chemicals, called "neurotransmitters." Changes in these brain chemicals may cause or contribute to clinical depression.
- Cognitive - People with negative thinking patterns and low self-esteem are more likely to develop clinical depression.
- Gender - Women experience clinical depression at a rate that is nearly twice that of men.<sup>[3]</sup> While the reasons for this are still unclear, they may include the hormonal changes women go through during menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause. Other reasons may include the stress caused by the multiple responsibilities that women have.
- Co-occurrence - Clinical depression is more likely to occur along with certain illnesses, such as heart disease, cancer, Parkinson's disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease and hormonal disorders.
- Medications - Side effects of some medications can bring about depression.
- Genetic - A family history of clinical depression increases the risk for developing the illness.
- Situational - Difficult life events, including divorce, financial problems or the death of a loved one can contribute to clinical depression.

## References

[1] National Institute of Mental Health: "The Numbers Count: Mental Illness in America," *Science on Our Minds Fact Sheet Series*. Accessed August 1999. Netscape: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/numbers.cfm>

[2] Rupp A, Gause E, Regier D: "Research Policy Implications of Cost-of-Illness Studies for Mental Disorders," *British Journal of Psychiatry Suppl* 1998; 36:19-25.

[3] National Institute of Mental Health, D/ART Campaign, "Depression: What Every Woman Should Know," (1995). Pub No. 95-3871.