

DEPRESSION: WHAT IS IT?



Most of us feel “down” or “blue” some days. You might say you are “depressed” when you are upset, angry, or sad about something. For many people, though, depression is much worse than having a bad day.

More than 1 in 20 adults have this more serious and lasting depression at any given time. When depression hangs on for a long time and includes symptoms in addition to low mood, we call it a disorder or disease.

The disease of depression lasts more than 2 weeks at a time. If you have depression in this way, which is called major depressive disorder, you usually feel low every day. You sleep badly. Food does not taste as good to you. You do not have enough energy to do your usual chores. Depression makes you lose interest in things you used to like. It is hard to concentrate. You can feel nervous or “out of it.” You might wish you were dead.

IT CAN TAKE DIFFERENT FORMS

The disease of depression can take different forms. The way it looks depends on who is depressed. Children, for example, may not know how to talk about feeling depressed. They might show it instead with their behavior. They might cry more or get into more fights, or not do their schoolwork as well as they once did. Older people who may not be able to remember or think properly, too, might show depression with upsetting behavior.

Some people with depression get better and worse over days instead of staying depressed for weeks at a time. This kind of depression can be just as bad as the kind that lasts. The depression keeps coming back and that can be frustrating and painful. Some adults with this kind of depression eat more instead of less, and sleep more instead of less. If your depression is like this, you may think

it is due to some disappointing thing in your life. This kind of depression, though, is more than a reaction to things in your life. This pattern of feeling better and worse all the time sometimes means that you have the disease of depression.

Some people who get depressed may not need much sleep. They get very busy. They may spend too much money. Sometimes they do risky or strange things. Severe behavior like this is called manic. People who get depressed and manic can have manic depressive disorder or bipolar disorder. That is a different type of mood issue. The treatments are not the same. Treating someone who is bipolar like someone with depression can be the wrong way to go.

DEPRESSION IS TREATABLE

If you do not treat depression, it might go away on its own. But it often stays the same or gets worse. This is dangerous because depression that lasts can affect a person’s health badly. It can take the fun out of life. It can make it hard or impossible to hold a job. It can put stress on relationships. It can even lead to death, from suicide or sickness.

But depression is treatable. Talking to a trained therapist can help. For people who need medication, there are lots of good choices. Making healthy lifestyle choices, too, is helpful. Getting enough sleep, exercise, good food, and time with people is important for helping depression. It is also important to reduce stress and make time for fun.

If you have depression that is serious, talk with someone about how to get the help you need.

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