

Depression: What You Should Know

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Depression is one of the most common forms of mental illness. It can affect eating habits, sleeping patterns, feelings of self-esteem and physical well-being. This guide will help you identify the symptoms of depression, recognize its causes and understand the available treatment options.



MontGuide

MT200507HR Reprint 3/08

JOHN LOOKS OUT ACROSS THE FAMILY FARM AND wonders how long it will be before he has to sell off land in order to pay the bills that keep piling up. As the drought persists, fuel prices increase and commodity prices fluctuate, John finds himself sinking deeper and deeper into despair. At first he thinks he is simply tired from working long hours. Then he tells himself he's coming down with the flu. When the feelings of hopelessness, sadness and lack of energy go on for five weeks, John realizes he is depressed but does not want to admit it to anyone. After all, he tells himself, it's probably all just in his head. He feels he should be able to snap out of it.

Depression is an illness that affects your body, mood and thoughts

Julie attends high school and feels the pressure mounting to please her parents, be popular with the cliques in school, be perfect at sports and achieve high grades. She feels her whole world is crashing in on her. Her head feels cloudy. All she wants to do is sleep so she doesn't have to deal with anything.

Mary recently had a baby. She and her husband were excited for the birth of their first child but now Mary feels resentment, jealousy, anger and sadness. She doesn't know why. She feels she should be overjoyed with her new baby, but can't seem to shake her crying spells and mood swings.

These stories may sound familiar to you. They are examples of the various ways that millions of Americans experience depression.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, in any given one-year period, approximately 9.5 percent of the population (18.8 million American adults) suffers from a depressive illness. Depressive illness can interfere with the normal functioning of the affected people as well as those around them. Depression can become a serious

illness for individuals and their families. Unfortunately, most people with depressive illness do not seek treatment. The information provided in this Montguide will help you identify depression and its symptoms, recognize the causes of depression and understand available treatment.

What is depression?

Depression is an illness that affects your body, mood and thoughts. It can have a negative impact on your eating habits, sleeping patterns, self-esteem and physical well-being. Depression doesn't just go away and should not be confused with having the blues. If left untreated, depression can last for weeks, months or years.

The Montana Mental Health Association reports that severe depression is one of the most common forms of mental illness.

- Roughly 18.8 million Americans—about 9.5 percent of the U.S. population—experience a major depressive disorder within any given year.
- 15 percent of all people with a depressive disorder commit suicide.
- 80 percent of all people with a depressive disorder are not seeking treatment.
- 41 percent of all women with depression are too embarrassed to seek treatment.
- 54 percent of all people think depression is a personal character flaw instead of a mental illness.
- Studies have shown that depression is a significant contributor to fatal coronary disease, likely to be the second largest killer (after heart disease) by 2020.

Everyone, at some point in their lives, will be affected either by their own or someone else's depression. You can manage depression by reaching out for help.

Symptoms of depression

It is important to understand that not everyone who has a depressive illness will exhibit all of the following symptoms. The number and severity of these symptoms vary with each individual:

- Appetite loss or increase
- Insomnia or excessive sleeping
- Fatigue or energy decrease
- Restlessness and increased or unexplained irritability
- Loss of interest in hobbies or pleasurable activities
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Physical symptoms including headaches, digestive disorders and chronic pain
- Persistent feelings of sadness or anxiety
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Agitation
- Neglect of personal appearance
- Crying
- Aggression
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness or pessimism
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts

Causes of depression

Even though depressive illness runs in some families, not everyone who has a predisposition for depression will experience it. Typically, people who have lower self-esteem, who tend to be pessimistic or who can be easily overwhelmed by stress will be more prone to depression. Also, physical changes, such as a major medical illness, may initiate a depressive illness. Other significant events such as the loss of a loved one, loss of a job, relationship changes, financial concerns or any stressful change in daily life can trigger a depressive episode, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. Often, it is not one single factor that leads to depressive illness, but rather a complex combination of several factors.

Depression in women

Depression is twice as likely to occur in females as in males. Hormonal changes throughout life including menstrual cycle changes, pregnancy, miscarriage, postpartum period, pre-menopause and menopause are likely to contribute to the increase in occurrence. Many women seem particularly

Depression touches everyone. While it will not go away by itself, the good news is that there are many effective ways to treat depressive illness. If you, or someone you know, has symptoms of depression, it's important to get effective, professional help.

vulnerable after giving birth. This may be due to physical changes, added responsibility and hormonal fluctuations. While many women who experience the blues after giving birth bounce back, a full-blown depressive episode is cause for concern and signals the need for treatment.

Depression in men

Although men experience depression less often than women, between three and four million men are affected by the illness. Doctors are less likely to suspect depression in men, and men are less likely to admit experiencing depressive symptoms than their female counterparts. Men often hide their depressive illness through the use of alcohol, drugs or working longer hours. Middle-aged men are among the highest risk groups for completion of suicide. Men display their depression in different ways than females, typically expressing it through irritability, anger or discouraged behavior.

Depression in older adults

Depression in older adults living in the U.S. is often overlooked and left untreated. One reason for this is the incorrect belief that depression is a normal part of the aging process. Another reason is that depression in elders is often considered a symptom of other illnesses. Depression is not a normal part of aging for anyone. Some older adults fail to seek treatment because of the mistaken belief that they must stay strong and tough it out.

Depression in children and teens

According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry:

- Teen depression almost always leads to suicidal thoughts.
- The number one cause of teen suicide is untreated depression.
- Each year, 500,000 young adults, ages 15 to 25, attempt suicide. And each year, 5,000 young adults commit suicide.
- Young adult males succeed at suicide almost twice as often as any other group.
- Of those who attempt suicide and do not receive treatment, 80 percent are likely to try it again.

Increased focus has been placed on depression in children during the past two decades. Children who are depressed may pretend to be sick, refuse to go to school, cling to a parent or get into trouble at school. They may be sullen, negative, grouchy or feel misunderstood. Normal behavior varies from child to child, and from one childhood stage to another. This may make it difficult to determine whether a child is going through a stage or suffering from depression. If you suspect that a child is exhibiting symptoms of depression, it is important to get help from a doctor or a mental health professional. You should be aware that these factors place children and teens at high risk for depression:

- Traumatic events or changes in a teen's life (for example, an abusive parent, divorce, death of a loved one or break-up with a longtime girlfriend or boyfriend)
- Difficulty coping with anger
- Problems in school
- Lifestyle changes such as weight loss, weight gain or difficulty sleeping
- A desire to drink alcohol or use drugs
- An interest in violence or a growing fear of violence

How to help yourself

Depression will not just go away, but there are many different effective options for treatment. These include counseling, diet improvement, exercise and in some cases medication. Other successful treatment options include getting training in social skills, assertiveness and relaxation techniques. It is important that individuals work with their doctor and/or mental health provider to find the right combination of treatment options.

Here are some other ways you can help yourself if you're suffering from depression:

- Talk to friends, relatives, clergy or even call a crisis line. Seek out supportive people you can lean on and share your feelings with them.
- Get involved in an activity that you enjoy.
- Start exercising. Join a health club or simply take walks.
- Break large projects into smaller tasks more easily done. Set priorities and do at least one productive thing per day, then work up to five.
- Get adequate sleep
- Practice healthy eating
- Expect to heal gradually. Feeling better takes time.

If you are experiencing depression and are unable to try any of these suggestions, seek help from a professional.

How family and friends can help

If you suspect that someone you know is depressed, the most important thing you can do is to be supportive and help that person get the right treatment. Helping someone with depression may be as simple as listening to them, or going with them to see a doctor or mental health professional.

Where to get help

Check your local phone book for services including mental health, health care, suicide prevention, crisis intervention, counselors, psychologists, hospitals or physicians. In case of an emergency, emergency room doctors can provide temporary help and should be able to provide you with resources for ongoing care.

If you do not have personal insurance or a relationship with a mental health professional, contact the Mental Health Center nearest you. Information on local Mental Health Centers can be found in the phone services pages of your local telephone book. Here are two national resources that may also be helpful:

National Institute of Mental Health
Office of Communications
6001 Executive Boulevard,
Room 8184, MSC 9663
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663
Phone: 301-443-4513
Fax: 301-443-4279
Toll Free: 1-866-615-NIMH (6464)
TTY: 301-443-8431
Email nimhinfo@nih.gov
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

American Psychiatric Association (APA)
1000 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1825
Arlington, VA 22209-3901
Phone: 703-907-7300
<http://www.psych.org>

Acknowledgements:

Verlin Koenig, Valley County Extension Agent,
MSU Extension

Sharon Gaffney, Missoula County Extension,
MSU Extension

Pam Forester, MSU Extension

Janae Heap, Montana State Extension Service

Adina Smith, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of
Health and Human Development, Director of Human
Development Clinic

Jennifer Wells, Hill County Extension Agent,
MSU Extension

Phyllis Hansen, Yellowstone County,
MSU Extension

Jane A. Wolery, Teton County Extension Agent,
MSU Extension

Peggy Lombard, Park County Extension Agent,
MSU Extension



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**File under: Human Development F-4 (Personal & Social Well Being)
Reprint March 2008 700-308SA**