

OCTOBER IS NATIONAL DEPRESSION & MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING MONTH

Everyone occasionally has bouts of sadness, but these feelings are usually fleeting. When a person has a depressive disorder, it interferes with daily life and normal functioning. It is a common but serious illness.

There is no single known cause of depression, but it likely results from a combination of genetic, biochemical, environmental and psychological factors. Depression commonly coexists with other illnesses, such as anxiety disorders or alcohol/substance abuse. It can affect anyone at any time, from children to older adults.

Recognizing the Symptoms

People with depressive illnesses do not all experience the same symptoms. The severity, frequency and duration will vary depending on the individual and the illness. Think about yourself and your loved ones. Mark any that apply. Have you noticed:

- Trouble falling, staying asleep or sleeping too much?
- Poor appetite or overeating?
- Feeling sad, anxious or “empty” often?
- Feeling guilty, worthless or hopeless often?
- Loss of interest in activities you/they once enjoyed?
- Thoughts or mentions of suicide.
- Feeling a lack of energy or motivation to do normal activities?
- Trouble concentrating on activities such as reading or watching TV?
- Moving or talking slower than normal? Or being more fidgety and restless?

Did you know...?
*About 1 in 4 adults
suffer from some type
of diagnosable
mental disorder in a
given year?*

People who have gone through a recent emotional crisis or who are grieving a recent loss may experience these symptoms more often.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Depression is a highly treatable disorder. The first step is to visit a doctor, where he/she will perform a medical examination and rule out factors that may be causing the condition, such as certain medications or a thyroid disorder. Once diagnosed, a person will likely be treated with psychotherapy and/or medication. In the meantime, it is important to exercise, participate in activities, spend time with friends and relatives, and think positively. If you have access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), they may be able to offer assistance as well.

Helping a Loved One Affected by Depression

Knowing a depressed person can affect you too. The most important thing to do is to help him/her get an appropriate diagnosis and treatment. Other ways to lend a hand:

- Offer emotional support, understanding, patience and encouragement.
- Be a good listener.
- Never ignore comments about suicide; report them to your friend's relative or doctor, or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **(800) 273-TALK**.
- Invite your friend to do things with you; if he/she declines, keep trying, but don't push.
- Remind your friend that with time and treatment, the depression will lift.

For more information, visit the National Institute for Mental Health Web site at www.nimh.nih.gov or www.mentalhealthscreening.org or speak with a trusted health care professional.