

Coping with Depression

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a prolonged and persistent negative mood which can color and interfere with many aspects of one's life. It is characterized by feelings of worthlessness, excessive guilt, loneliness, sadness, hopelessness, and self-doubt. Suicidal thoughts may also be present. Normal everyday depression can last for a few minutes to a few days. Everyone has experienced feelings of depression, periods of being "down" or "sad" at one time or another. These feelings are a normal part of being human. These feelings commonly follow loss or disappointment and they usually pass in a few hours or days. On the other hand, depression that becomes intense and lasts for extended periods of time and interferes with one's health and social well-being may be a dysfunctional form of depression, something beyond the "everyday sort." This more serious type of depression can often be helped by seeing a mental health specialist.

WHAT CAUSES PEOPLE TO BE DEPRESSED?

- Significant loss.
- Loss of control over the environment. The person feels that nothing can be done to change unfortunate events in life.
- Unrealistic expectations.
- Disappointment.
- Perceived failure.
- Negative thinking which gradually becomes self-defeating.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- *Emotional Symptoms:* Sadness, Anxiety, Guilt., Anger, Mood swings, Helplessness, Hopelessness
- *Physical Symptoms:* Sleeping too much or too little, Overeating or loss of appetite, Constipation, Weight loss or gain, Irregular menstrual cycle, Gradual loss of sexual desire.
- *Behavioral Symptoms:* Crying for no apparent reason, Withdrawal from other people and new situations, Getting angry easily, Being unmotivated to set or meet goals, Loss of interest in one's physical appearance, Loss of interest in activities which were once of interest, Turning to drugs or alcohol.
- *Thoughts/Perceptions which may become Self-Defeating:* Feelings of being a failure, Criticizing oneself frequently, Disappointment, Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, Blaming oneself for unfortunate happenings, Being pessimistic about the future.

HOW TO OVERCOME DEPRESSION AND REGAIN POSITIVE OUTLOOK

- Be aware of the cause of your depression and try to be optimistic about the future.
- Try to be aware of your negative thoughts and replace them with positive ideas.
- Focus on your positive experiences.
- Make a weekly list of your positive accomplishments.
- Get socially active.
- Make a weekly schedule of your daily activities and do not forget to include social activities.
- Find a hobby or two.
- Exercise daily.
- Use self-relaxation techniques whenever you feel tense. For example, slowly breathe in and out for several minutes until your whole body feels relaxed.
- Do some volunteer work to keep you active.
- Set realistic goals.
- Learn to accept that everyone has different abilities and focus on your unique characteristics and positive accomplishments.
- Be assertive when you are expressing anger.
- Try to know and develop your strengths.
- **Get professional help if symptoms of depression persist. Talk with your doctor about counseling at Student Health Services or call Counseling Services at 784-4648 to schedule an appointment.**

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