



3 Things Everyone Should Know About Depression

Depression is common

Depression is not just feeling down

Depression is treatable

Depression is a common, yet serious, illness that affects 20 million Americans each year.

If you or someone you know is depressed, you are not alone. At least one person in ten will have a depression at least once in his or her life. Depression in its various forms (anxiety, stress, insomnia, fatigue, vague aches and pains, etc.) is one of the most common problems seen by doctors.

Women experience depression at a rate that is nearly twice that of men. The reasons may include things like: hormonal changes, coping with multiple responsibilities, persistent negative thinking and low self esteem, genetic reasons, medication side effects, or situational reasons. Many women are also particularly vulnerable after the birth of a baby. The hormonal and physical changes, as well as the added responsibility of a new life, can be factors that lead to postpartum depression in some women. While transient "blues" are common in new mothers, a full-blown depressive episode is not a normal occurrence and requires active intervention.

Although men are less likely to suffer from depression than women, 6 million men in the United States are affected by the illness. In fact, the rate of suicide in men is four times that of women (though more women attempt it). Depression may be more difficult to recognize in men because, instead of feeling hopeless and helpless, men will exhibit irritability, anger, and discouragement. Men often mask their depression with alcohol, drugs, or by the socially acceptable habit of working excessively long hours. Additionally, men are less likely to admit to depression and doctors are less likely to suspect it. Even if a man realizes that he is depressed, he may be less willing than a woman to seek help. Encouragement and support from concerned family members can make a difference.

Depression is not just feeling down.

Depression is a mood disorder that causes you to feel sad or hopeless for an extended period of time. It is important to know the difference in clinical depression and having the blues. Depression is an illness that robs one of the meaning of life. Depression is not about being weak, and it is not about just feeling low or having a few bad days. A depressive disorder is an illness that involves the body, mood, and thoughts. It affects the way a person eats and sleeps, the way one feels about oneself, and the way one thinks about things. A depressive disorder is not the same as a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with a depressive illness cannot merely "pull themselves together" and get better. Many people with depression produce a higher-than-normal level of the stress hormone, cortisol. Cortisol suppresses the immune system. People with poor health may run from doctor to doctor putting out one fire after another when the underlying cause may be depression.

Depression affects the length and quality of life. It is the #1 cause of alcoholism, drug abuse, and other addictions. Depression can be an all-pervasive emotional-mental-physical source of misery. It can affect all aspects of a person's life impairing ability to sleep, eat, work, and get along with others. It damages our self-esteem, self-confidence, and our ability to accomplish everyday tasks. Depression is not just feeling down; it

October 18, 2006

puts a dark, gloomy cloud over how we see the world, our future and ourselves. The cloud cannot be willed away, nor can we ignore it and have it magically disappear.

There is also a link between stress and depression. There is a complex relationship among stressful situations, our mind and body's reaction to stress and the onset of clinical depression. It is clear that some people develop depression after a stressful event in their lives - death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or the end of a relationship. Stress can also occur as the result of a more positive event such as getting married, moving to a new city, or starting a new job. It is not uncommon for either positive or negative events to become a crisis that precedes the development of clinical depression. Depression can be seasonal as well as situational with some finding the dreariness of winter months particularly tough. This is called SAD - Seasonal Affective Disorder. Below are some core signs and symptoms common with a variety of types of depression:

The Super Seven Symptoms of Depression:

- Feeling empty, lonely and isolated
- Feeling hopeless or worthless
- Lacking an interest in activities
- Feeling mentally and physically tired
- Finding it difficult to make decisions
- Experiencing physical pain that does not respond to treatment
- Having a greatly reduced or increased appetite

If you experience any of these distressing symptoms for more than two weeks you should contact your doctor. And you should seek help immediately if you feel you can “no longer take it” or feel like ending your life and suicide is the only option.

The good news is depression is treatable!

Sadly, most people do not recognize this and the symptoms of depression can keep someone from seeking treatment. Depression is nothing to be ashamed of: It is an illness that, without treatment, can last for weeks, months, or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help most people who suffer from depression.

The two main pillars of treatment for depression – natural and synthetic antidepressant medications for the brain, and psychotherapy for the mind – are mostly natural processes.

Psychotherapy is a common type of counseling that mostly involves talking – a *natural* process. There is no brainwashing. Prescription antidepressant medications simply restore the brain's *natural* levels of certain *naturally produced* neurotransmitters. You don't “feel” antidepressant medications in the way you feel other mood-altering drugs such as alcohol, tranquilizers, or amphetamines. The improvements experienced with antidepressants seem to come from re-establishing natural levels of certain neurotransmitters produced by the brain.

People often benefit by gathering with others going through similar experiences. Those who are healing from depression are no exception. **Support groups** are an excellent place to share experiences, suggestions, information, and, obviously, support. Perhaps the most important knowledge to be gained from support groups is that you *are not alone*.

Four ways you can begin the healing process:

1. Talk to your doctor
2. Learn more about depression
3. Be gentle with yourself, be patient with yourself, give yourself time to heal.
4. Take small steps such as walking - the fresh air and exercise will be super!

October 18, 2006

About Centerstone

Centerstone (www.centerstone.org), celebrating 50 years of service in 2006, is the largest behavioral healthcare provider in Tennessee and the ninth largest in the nation. A not-for-profit organization, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to individuals of all ages and their families. Centerstone is devoted to research that seeks to identify, treat and eliminate mental illness. Each year, the organization provides services to more than 50,000 individuals. Children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and families all receive help from a multitude of different programs at more than 65 facilities and 140 partnership locations throughout the region. For more information about Centerstone, please call (615) 460-4357 or toll free at (888) 291-4357.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies. In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, "Homicide Response." Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.

Call Centerstone at (615) 460-HELP (4357) for more information on how to know if you are depressed and to learn the positive steps you can begin today to restore hope, healing and a new future today.

To schedule Susan Gillpatrick to speak with your group or organization, contact her at 615-460-4445.