

LEARNING ABOUT DEPRESSION

DISEASE MANAGEMENT BROCHURE Vol. 9, No. 2, 2008

ACCESS NURSING SERVICES



What is Depression ?

Depression is a disease. It is an illness that comes from a chemical imbalance in the brain. People who are diagnosed with depression have an illness that affects their whole body, including their:

- Thoughts
- Feelings
- Behavior
- Physical health
- Appearance
- Daily activities

Depression is a normal reaction to life's problems, but when it lasts for long periods of time it can keep a person from leading a normal life. It can affect someone's life as much as chronic heart disease.



Depression is one of the most common medical problems in the world. Millions of American suffer from it-so many, in fact, that it has been called "the common cold of mental illness." one out of every five people experiences an episode of major depression at some point in his or her life.

What Depression is NOT

Depression is a disease that has been misunderstood. Myths and misconceptions have led people to believe things about depression that are not true. It is important to remember that it is a disease, not a choice.

Depression is NOT:

- A blue mood that lasts a few days and then goes away.

- Something people can "shake off" if they put their minds to it.
- A sign of weakness.
- A normal part of getting older.
- A sign of lack of character or courage.
- An excuse to be lazy.
- A choice people make because they just can't get their lives together.
- Something to be ashamed of.
- A sign that someone is "crazy."
- Hopeless.

Risk Factors for Depression

People are at a greater risk for depression if they have:

- A strong family history of depression.
- Migraine headaches.
- Chronic pain.
- A serious or chronic illness.

- Had a recent heart attack.
- A history of ulcers.
- Grief from loss of a loved one.
- Been physically or sexually abused.
- Lots of stress.
- A drug or alcohol addiction.

Or if they are:

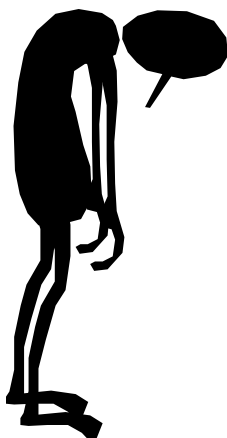
- Female.
- A hyperactive child.
- A teenager.
- A senior citizen.

Symptoms of Depression

- Weight loss (from a poor appetite and not caring about food)
- Weight gain (from eating too much because of feeling depressed)
- Problems with sleeping (either too much or too little)
- Extreme fatigue and irritability
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Lack of interest in activities that used to be fun.
- Loss of sex drive
- Poor self-image(not caring about getting dressed or washing their hair)
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Having ideas about suicide
- Negative thoughts
- Reduced concentration
- Guilt and low self-esteem



Can Depression Be Treated?



- There are a number of ways to treat depression. Some people are treated with psychotherapy (also called "talk" therapy). Some are treated with antidepressant medications.
- Other forms of treatment for depressed people are physical exercise and, for some seriously depressed people, electric shock therapy.
- There are a number of alternative therapies that have been found to be effective in treating depression. These include acupuncture, guided imagery, chiropractic, yoga, hypnosis, biofeedback, aromatherapy, relaxation techniques, herbal remedies and massage.
- Hospitalization may be necessary if people with depression are suicidal.
- More than 80% of people with depression can be treated successfully with antidepressants, psychotherapy or a combination of both.

Depression in the Elderly

■ The most important thing to remember about depression and the elderly is that being depressed is **not** a normal part of getting older! However, depression is a common illness in the older population.

■ Depression often occurs with illnesses such as heart disease, stroke,

diabetes, cancer and Parkinson's Disease. Sometimes, these illnesses hide the symptoms of depression.

■ People over 65 are more likely to be taking a number of different medications. Sometimes, these medications have side effects that make the depression worse.

■ The risk factors that make an elderly person more likely to suffer from depression include:

- Being Female.
- Living alone.
- Having few friends.
- Being a widow.
- Fear of death.

▪ Having a chronic illness or dementia.

▪ Having a recent death in the family.

▪ Having a family history of depression.

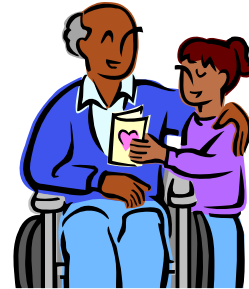
▪ Depression tends to last longer in the elderly and is more likely to lead to suicide.

Remember

Depression is not just a feeling. Like diabetes, depression is an illness

Communication with Depressed Clients

- Being a good listener can help your clients express their feelings.
- Don't try to "fix" your clients who are depressed.
- You can try to understand them and provide comfort with your presence and your words.
- Don't tell them that you know how they feel. You probably don't.
- Avoid being extra cheerful around depressed people. But, don't take on their sad mood either. Just be yourself, and remain pleasantly professional at all times.



Some things that might be helpful to say to a depressed clients include:

- "I care about you"
- "You are not alone"
- "Do you want a hug?"
- "I'm sorry you are in so much pain."
- "Only you can really understand what you are feeling, but I am here with you."
- "You are important to me."
- "This is what helped me. Maybe it can help you." (But only if you've had similar experiences to what the other person is going through.)



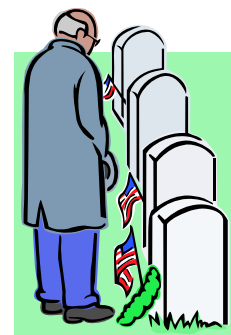
Some things that might NOT be helpful to say to a depressed clients include:

- "What's your problem?"
- "Snap out of it."
- "It's all in your mind."
- "Why don't you count your blessings instead of whining."
- "I've got more problems than you do!"
- "Cheer up!"
- "Just don't think about it."
- "Stop feeling so sorry for yourself."
- "Everybody has a bad day now and then."
- "Believe me. I know how you feel. I was depressed once for a few days."



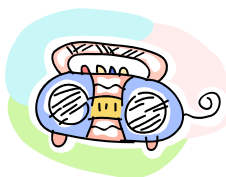
Event that might Trigger Suicidal Behavior

- Losing a close relationship or getting divorced.
- Knowing someone else who recently committed suicide.
- Being diagnosed with an illness.
- Experiencing the anniversary of a loved one's death or suicide.
- Going through a big change such as retiring from a job or moving to a nursing home.



Working with Depressed Clients

- Your depressed clients are unwilling to do anything for themselves, so you end up taking a more active role in their personal care. Be **patient**, but continue to encourage your clients to participate in their care.
- Be sure to encourage your clients to eat a good breakfast. Helping them with mouth care before breakfast may motivate them to eat more.
- Self-help tapes, CD's, and videos can also be helpful resources for dealing with depression.



- When your clients do get up to ambulate, be sure they have a steady gait. And remember that clients who take antidepressant medications may be at a higher risk for falls. Guard your clients' safety!

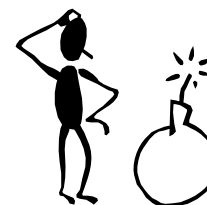


- Be prepared to hear your depressed clients say, "Leave me alone." or "I don't want your help today." They may refuse to have a bath, or to get dressed or to participate in an activity.
- Be sure to report any weight gains or losses.

- Encourage your depressed clients to drink lots of fluids. Watch out for changes in their bowel habits, and report any signs of constipation.
- Depressed clients may sometimes take out their frustration by lashing out at caregivers. You should try not to take it personally. Keep a professional attitude and a pleasant demeanor toward your clients.
- Remember that clients have the right to refuse treatment. However, you need to report to your supervisor if you are unable to complete any client's care as ordered.



- Regular exercise is important. It may keep depression from coming back, and it helps reduce the symptoms of depression.
- Be sure to report any new confusion or a change in a client's vital signs—especially if the client takes a lot of



About 20% of all suicide in the United States are elderly people. The highest suicide rate of all is for white men over the age of 75.

Early Warning Signs of Possible Suicide

- All the symptoms of depression
- Frequent angry outbursts
- Increased crying or reduced emotional expression
- Drug abuse
- Talking negatively about the future

- Being preoccupied with death
- Increased risky physical or sexual behavior

Late Warning Signs of Possible Suicide

- Talking about suicide, especially about having a plan to commit suicide
- Wanting to be alone all the time

- Saying life is meaningless
- Talking about "giving up."
- Being in a sudden good mood. (People who make up their minds to end their lives sometimes feel " happy" because they see an end to their pain.)
- Putting one's life in order

- Giving away possessions

What can you Do?

- Trust your instincts! Take action if you suspect that a client is suicidal. It's better to be wrong than to wait until it's too late!
- There is an increased risk of suicidal behavior when a client first starts taking antidepressant medication.

POST TEST

Please circle the best choice and then check your answers with educator. **You may submit this paper to your coordinator or send by mail to office.**

1. True or False

Anyone who is depressed for longer than two weeks needs to take antidepressant drugs.

2. True or False

Body chemistry, genetic link and personal loss are some causes of depression.

3. True or False

Depression is an uncommon disease, especially in the elderly.

4. True or False

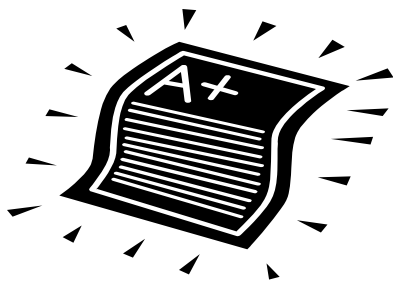
It's easy for doctors to overlook depression in elderly people.

5. True or False

A client who has just started taking antidepressants is at risk for suicide.

6. True or False

It is best to do as much for your depressed client as possible to help them through their depression.



7. True or False

You are doing your depressed client a favor by telling them to cheer up and stop feeling sorry for themselves.

8. True or False

Some warning signs of possible suicide are putting one's life in order, giving away possessions and increased risky physical or sexual behavior.

9. When you take care of your depressed patient, Ms. Thomas, you should NOT:

- A. Report any weight gains or losses.
- B. Encourage to drink 1,000 ml of fluids.
- C. Encourage to eat a good breakfast.
- D. Be a good listener can help your clients express their feelings.

10. If you are caring for a 70 year old man with depression, you should:

- A. Encourage him to lie down as much as possible.
- B. Remind him to take his antidepressant medication on schedule.
- C. Offer him frequent high fat snacks to give him energy.
- D. Remind him that all elderly people get depressed.



INSERVICE CREDIT: **1 HOUR**

SCORE: _____

EMPLOYEE NAME: _____

TITLE: _____

EDUCATOR SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____