***DEPRESSION***

Depression according to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, is defined as a medical condition in which a person feels very sad and anxious and often has physical symptoms such as being unable to sleep, etc. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression is the main cause of disability worldwide. It can affect adults, adolescents and children. Depression is classified as a mood disorder that involves a persistent feeling of sadness, loss of interest, or anger that interfere with a person’s everyday activities. Depression is also different from usual mood fluctuations and short-lived emotional responses to challenges in everyday life. Depression is an ongoing problem, not a passing one. It consists of episodes during which the symptoms last for at least 2 weeks. Depression can last for several weeks, months or years. It’s important to note that feeling down at times is a normal part of life. Sad and upsetting events happen to everyone. However, if you are feeling down or hopeless on a regular basis, you could be dealing with depression. Depression is considered a serious medical condition that can get worse without proper treatment. Those who seek treatment often see improvements in symptoms in just few weeks. Although there are known effective treatments for mental disorders, between 76% and 85% of people in low and middle-income countries receive no treatment for their disorders. Barriers o effective care include a lack of resources, lack of grained health-care providers and social stigma associated with mental disorders. Another barrier to effective care is inaccurate assessment. The burden of depression and other mental health conditions is on the rise globally.

**CAUSES OF DEPRESSION**

There are a number of factors that may increase the chance of depression, including the following:

* Abuse: Past physical, sexual or emotional abuse can increase the vulnerability to clinical depression later in life.
* Certain medications: Some drugs, such as isotretinoin (used to treat acne), the antiviral drug interferon-alpha, and corticosteroids, can increase a person’s risk of depression.
* Conflict: Depression in someone who has the biological vulnerability to develop depression may result from personal conflicts or disputes with family friends or even friends.
* Death or a loss: Sadness or grief from the death or loss of a loved one, though natural, may increase the risk of depression.
* Genetics: A family history of depression may increase a person’s risk, it is thought that depression is a complex trait, meaning that there are probably many different genes that each exert small effects, rather than a single gene that contributes to disease risk. The genetics of depression, like most psychiatric disorders, are not as simple or straightforward as in purely genetic diseases.
* Major events: Even good events such as starting a new job, graduating, or getting married can lead to depression. So can moving, losing a job or income, getting divorced, or retiring. However, the syndrome of clinical depression is never just a “normal” response to stressful life events.
* Other personal problems: Problems such as social isolation due to other mental illnesses or being cast out of a family or social group can contribute to the risk of developing clinical depression.
* Serious illnesses: Sometimes, depression co-exists with a major illness or may be triggered by another medical condition.
* Substance abuse: Nearly 30% of people with substance abuse problems also have major or clinical depression. Even if drugs or alcohol temporarily make you feel better, they untimely will aggravate depression.

**SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION**

The symptoms vary between individuals and may change over time. For a doctor to diagnose depression, a person must have five or more symptoms that must be present during the same 2-week period.

* Depressed mood on most days, including feelings of sadness or emptiness
* Loss of pleasure in previously enjoyed activities
* Too little or too much sleep most days
* Unintended weight loss or gain or changes in appetite
* Physical agitation or feelings of sluggishness
* Low energy or fatigue
* Feeling worthless or guilty
* Irritability
* Negative thoughts
* Losing empathy with others
* Trouble concentrating or making decisions
* Intrusive thoughts of death or suicide

**COMMON TYPES OF DEPRESSION**

1. MAJOR DEPRESSION: This type causes symptoms that may:

* Begin suddenly, possibly triggered by a loss, crisis or change.
* Interfere with normal functioning
* Continue for months or years
* It is possible for a person to have only one episode of major depression. It is more common for episodes to be long lasting or to occur several times during a person’s life.

1. DYSTHYMIA: People with this illness are mildly depressed for years. They function fairly well on a daily basis but their relationships suffer over time.
2. BIPOLAR DISORDER: People with this type of illness change back and forth between periods of depression and periods of mania (an extreme high). Symptoms of mania may include:

* Less need for sleep
* Overconfidence
* Racing thoughts
* Reckless behavior
* Increased energy
* Mood changes are usually gradual but can be sudden

1. SEASON AFFECTIVE DISORDER(SAD): This is a depression that results from changes in the season. Most cases begin in the fall or winter, or when there is a decrease in sunlight.

**TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION**

* Medication: Antidepressants can help ease the symptoms of depression and return a person to normal functioning. Antidepressants are not habit forming.
* Psychotherapy: This can help many depressed people understand themselves and cope with their problems. Interpersonal therapy works to change relationships that affect depression and cognitive-behavioral therapy helps people change negative thinking and behavior patterns

**THINGS TO DO**

* See a doctor for complete check up
* Go to the counselling center and talk to a counselor
* Take a break and get some exercise
* Avoid extra stress and big changes
* Reduce or eliminate the use of alcohol or drugs
* Eat a proper, well-balanced diet
* Pace yourself, modify your schedule, and set realistic goals

**THINGS TO AVOID**

* Don’t make long-term commitments or important decisions unless necessary
* Don’t assume things are hopeless
* Don’t take up responsibility for events which are outside of your control
* Don’t avoid treatment as a way of coping

**HELPING A DEPRESSED FRIEND**

* Be empathetic and understanding
* Don’t try to “cheer up” a depressed person
* Avoid critical or shaming statements
* Challenge expressions of hopelessness
* Advocate for their recovery from depression
* Don’t become angry even though your efforts may be resisted or rejected
* Emphasize that depression is treatable
* Be supportive of counselor or doctor suggestions

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