

WIN OVER DEPRESSION

- Dr. H S Dhavale, M.D., D.P.M., Professor and Head, Department of Psychiatry
T.N. Medical College and B.Y.L. Nair Hospital, Mumbai-400008.



I believe Depression is known to exist since ancient times, However it's incidence is on the rise due to the higher levels of stress in everyday living, low frustration tolerance and lack of social support. Depression is observed more in females than in males, that is because of certain stages in a woman's life. Like the premenstrual period, post-delivery and menopausal period are known to precipitate depression. Unfortunately, these are considered normal deviations and hence get neglected by the person suffering, family members and at times, even by

doctors.

Depression has both, emotional as well as physical symptoms. Physical symptoms represent almost all the systems in the body, like cardiac symptoms G.I. symptoms, genito-urinary symptoms etc. Since physical symptoms are more evident than emotional symptoms, the patient frequently visits doctors, investigating every symptom. By doing this there is not only monetary loss but loss of time as well. So a proper understanding of depression and guidance from a counsellor is essential.

Patients who are unable to express their depression suffer in silence or turn to alcohol or sleeping pills for help. Suicide or harbouring suicidal feelings is a known complication of depression and may result in a permanent loss to the family and society. To avoid that, early detection and treatment is critical.

Family members play a vital role in the identification and management of depression. I have written this book in a simple, easy-to-understand language without any medical jargon and am sure that it will help in the early diagnosis, adequate treatment and rehabilitation of people affected by depression, so as to be able to live a good and happy life.

What is depression?

Depression is a kind of illness. Feeling 'low' or 'down' lasts for sometime is common but when such a feeling for a very long period, then a person is most likely suffering from depression.

Depressive illness is fairly widespread. Almost one in five people are affected by it, the world over.

Depressive illness is known to exist for centuries. Winston Churchill and Abraham Lincoln also suffered from Depressive illness. In the Mahabharata Arjun too was afflicted by Depressive illness. But the incidence of depression is on the rise due to increasing stress and strain in life, and lack of social support.

Depression is like the common cold of emotions.(80 to 90% of depressed people recover fully with the right medicines as prescribed by the doctor). Counselling and understanding depression by the person affected and their close friends and family members is the first step in winning over depression.

What causes depression?

There is no single cause for depression. It is caused by a combination of internal and external factors. Acute illnesses such as strokes or chronic physical illnesses can also precipitate depression. Some medicines used for treating blood pressure or long term use of steroids can also cause depression. In fact there is a chemical imbalance in the brain which results in depression. The

3 major factors known to play a significant role in its causation are hereditary, psychological and social. While the first two factors make a person vulnerable, the last triggers depressive illness.

Hereditary

If someone in the family is known to be suffering from depressive illness then their children are more prone to suffer from the same. An identical twin is at an even greater risk.

Psychological

Some of the common psychological causes of depressive illness are:

- Expectations being higher than reality.
- Rigid attitude.
- Constantly finding fault with others.

Social

Financial losses or the loss or death of a significant person and also constant quarrels with family members or children not coming up to expectations can lead to depression.

Is this also depression?

Depressions by itself is difficult to cope without proper medicines and counselling. Myths keep people away from seeking professional help. Pretending to feel fine does not drive away depression. If at all, it gets worse.

HAS BECOME LAZY

When a depressed person exhibits such a symptom. The people around him respond by saying -give him more work and he will be OK.

REALITY

Loss of desire to work and suddenly becoming lazy is a symptom of Depressive illness.

BAD OMEN AT WORK

Possessed by a 'devil' or an 'evil spirit' hence a doctor cannot be of much help.

REALITY

There is no scientific proof of such occurrences.

THINKS TOO MUCH

A person complains of too many confusing thoughts and shows no willingness to work.

REALITY

This stream of thought is beyond the control of one suffering from depression.

TALKING MAKES IT WORSE

Friends and family members behave as if nothing has happened.

REALITY

A close family member or friend can help a depressed person by allowing him to open-up and recover faster.

How to recognise depression?

There is a long list of symptoms which will differ from person to person. Also the intensity will vary in different episodes. Not all of them will be present in any one episode. In our culture physical

symptoms are more accepted than emotional symptoms and often manifest themselves as tiredness, fatigue and low energy levels. Outlined below are some of the other common ones. Understanding the symptoms will help a depressed person cope with the condition better. Also this will help people around understand and provide the needed support.

SHORT LIVED SADNESS

This type of depression occurs generally after a major disappointment or the death of significant person.

- At such times a person may.
- have a tendency to cry uncontrollably.
- have loss of appetite.
- lose interest in hobbies, children, sex, etc.

MODERATE DEPRESSION

In this type of depression a person feels that everything around them is in a mess.

- They cannot enjoy the company of friends.
- Feel guilty and useless.
- Feel low in energy which may results in reduced productivity.

SEVERE DEPRESSION

People suffering from this type of depression feel that their world is coming is to an end. They may no longer be able to cope with their day to day activities. They avoid people and people avoid them. They often contemplate suicide. Such persons should be given professional help at the earliest.

WATCH OUT (if 5 or more of the following are present)

- Change in appetite or weight.
- Loss of energy or weariness.
- Loss of interest in usual activities.
- Inability to concentrate or make decisions.
- Change in sleep pattern.
- Agitation or retardation.
- Self reproach or unnecessary guilt.
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.
- Depressed mood-most of the day.

Can I help myself?

Self-care is just the beginning. It allows you greater control and makes you feel better. Also any kind of exercise helps. Overcoming depression is a step-by-step process. You must keep your appointments with your doctor and take the medicines exactly as prescribed. In the beginning you may feel that bodily symptoms like tremulousness, constipation, etc. are getting worse, but do not discontinue medicines because the symptoms will diminish over a period of time. Avoid being alone. Depression cannot be cured overnight. Conquering depression is a step by step process. But the silver lining to this kind of mood disorder is that it is one of the most treatable.

Diagnosis

This booklet is created and published to help you understand what depression is. It is not a substitute for proper medical and/or professional help of any kind. Only your doctor is equipped to make a complete diagnosis and recommend the appropriate course of action.

Prevention

Depressed persons often get entangled in 'informed' helplessness. It is easier to set smaller, achievable goals. It heightens self-esteem. Also one of the easiest things to do is to talk to a friend in whom you have complete faith, trust and confidence. It works wonders.

Medicines

For many depressed persons, just talking to friends or performing simple exercises may not be sufficient. A class of drugs referred to as 'antidepressants' as prescribed by the doctor are also necessary. That is, both work better in tandem than either of them work individually.

Can I become normal again?

Yes! Almost everyone can recover from depression. But it is important to understand that recovery from depressive illness is a slow process. You must be in regular touch with your doctor, continue the medicines as prescribed (even if you begin to feel better). Seek support of friends and family members. Remember, depression can strike again. You need not lose hope. All you need to do is develop a positive attitude. Set your priorities right, without bending to physiological, psychological or social barriers, to be able to lead a normal happy life.