

MODULE FOURTEEN

DEPRESSION

Depression may be described as feeling sad, blue, unhappy, miserable, or down in the dumps. Most of us feel this way at one time or another for short periods. Depression is expressed differently according to one's age, sex, and culture. For example, a teenager is unlikely to exhibit the same signs of Depression as an elderly person would. Because of the overwhelming variables associated with this illness, there is no set list of stages one can expect to experience; it is unique to each individual.

Depression is an illness that involves the body, mood, and thoughts, that 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 wished away. People with a depressive disease cannot merely “pull themselves together” and get better. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months, or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help most people with Depression.

“Depression is an episodic illness. Episodes can last for weeks or months or years, and are interspersed with more or less symptom-free periods.

The major signs and Symptoms of Depression

For major depression, you may experience a sad or depressed mood, or an inability to feel pleasure, plus five or more of the following symptoms, for at least a two-week period

- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, or hopelessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities, including sex
- Difficulty concentrating and complaints of poor memory
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Appetite changes, which may include weight gain or loss
- Fatigue, lack of energy
- Thoughts of suicide or death
- Slow speech; slow movements
- Overeating
- Oversleeping
- Fatigue
- Extreme sensitivity to rejection
- Moods that worsen or improve in direct response to events
- Regular -- or "typical" -- depression, on the other hand, tends to be marked by pervasive sadness and a pattern of loss of appetite and difficulty fall or staying asleep.

Major Depressive Disorder

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, major depressive disorder is characterized by a combination of symptoms that interfere with a person's ability to work, sleep, study, eat, and enjoy once-pleasurable activities.

There are times you may feel sad, lonely, or hopeless for a few days. But major depression -- clinical depression -- lasts longer and is disabling. It can prevent you from functioning normally. An episode of clinical depression may occur only once in a person's lifetime. More often, though, it recurs throughout a person's life.

In addition, with major depression, one of the symptoms must be either depressed mood or loss of interest. The symptoms should be present daily or for most of the day or nearly daily for at least two weeks. Also, the depressive symptoms must cause clinically significant distress or impairment in functioning. The symptoms cannot be due to the direct effects of a substance -- drug abuse, medications -- or a medical condition, such as hypothyroidism, nor occur within two months of the loss of a loved one.

Types of Depression

1. **Major Depression:** This type of clinical Depression is characterized by a severe lack of interest in the things that were once enjoyed, or nonstop feelings of sadness.
2. **Bipolar disorder** or manic depressive illness: Also called Manic Depression, bipolar disorder is a type of depression that has either subtle or extreme “high” periods alternating with “low” periods of Depression.
3. **Dysthymic disorder:** This type of Depression is characterized by ongoing yet mild symptoms of Depression.
4. **Cyclothymia disorder:** is a relatively mild form of bipolar II disorder characterized by mood swings that may appear to be almost within the normal range of emotions. These mood swings range from mild depression, or dysthymia, to mania of low intensity, or hypomania.
5. **Postnatal depression (PND)** or Postpartum depression: is a complex mix of physical, emotional, and behavioral changes that occur in a mother after giving birth. It is a serious condition, affecting 10% of new mothers. Symptoms range from mild to severe Depression and may appear within days of delivery or gradually, perhaps up to a year later. Symptoms may last from a few weeks to a year

6. **Seasonal affective disorder (SAD):** This type of depression occurs seasonally and is caused by lack of sunlight. What are the Symptoms of Depression?

Causes of Depression

There are a number of factors that may increase the chance of depression, among which they includes the following:

- **Abuse.** Past physical, sexual, or emotional abuse can cause depression later in life.
- **Certain medications.** Some drugs, such as Accutane (used to treat acne), the antiviral drug interferon-alpha, and corticosteroids, can increase your risk of depression.
- **Conflict.** Depression in someone who has the biological vulnerability to develop depression may result from personal conflicts or disputes with family members or 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 the risk. It's thought that depression is a complex trait that may be inherited across generations, although the genetics of psychiatric disorders are not as simple or straightforward as in purely genetic diseases such as Huntington's chorea or cystic fibrosis.

- **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.
- **Other personal problems.** Problems such as social isolation due to other mental illnesses or being cast out of a family or social group can lead to depression.
- **Serious illnesses.** Sometimes depression co-exists with a major illness or is a reaction to the illness.
- **Substance abuse.** Nearly 30% of people with substance abuse problems also have major or clinical depression.
- **Life events**

Research suggests that continuing difficulties – long-term unemployment, living in an abusive or uncaring relationship, long-term isolation or loneliness, prolonged exposure to stress at work – are more likely to cause depression than recent life stresses. However, recent events (such as losing a job) or a combination of events can ‘trigger’ depression in people who are already at risk because of past bad experiences or personal factors.

“Depression creates mental and physical symptoms in our thinking, feeling and bodily experience, as well as our behavior. These symptoms can vary from one person to another. Symptoms may change throughout the day, but are usually worse after waking up in the morning.

ACTIVITY

1(a) Explain the sign, symptoms and cause of depression.

(b) Explain the following mood disorders.

(i). Major depression

(ii). Bipolar depression