



Depression: Deadlier in Spring



The TV ad tells us that depression hurts everywhere - emotionally *and* physically. It hurts everyone because it affects all our relationships. Serious depression can destroy families and lead to suicide. Yet most people don't know it is a treatable medical illness.¹ In truth, there are a variety of treatments with proven benefits even for acute cases. Unfortunately depression is one of the most difficult illnesses to treat because it attacks the will to live, which is normally a key factor in recovery. What this means is that friends, coworkers and family members must play a critical role as first

responders, providing the impetus to get the person diagnosed and treated, and encouraging them to follow the treatment plan, possibly forestalling tragedy.

Depression is Widespread

The National Institute for Mental Health reports that in any given year, 9.5 % or 20.9 million American adults suffer from a depressive illness¹ - that's almost 10%! Another surprise is that suicides peak in early summer. Why? Research has suggested that sunshine may act as a trigger by changing melatonin levels.² Others suggest it may be the contrast between increased light levels and darkness of mood which is painful and isolating for those who are depressed. The extra energy they also feel may enable them to carry out suicidal plans.

How Can You Tell?³

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest/pleasure in activities previously enjoyed, including sex
- Low energy, tiredness, slowed-down feeling
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Restlessness, irritability
- Medical conditions such as headaches, poor digestion, and chronic pain that do not respond to treatment

Many people are unaware of these symptoms. Without training, teachers and caregivers may misinterpret symptoms of depression as simply behavior or motivation problems. If you think you may be depressed yourself, this online test can help you decide if it's serious.⁴

What Causes Depression?

Inherited biological vulnerability plus additional life stressors; low self esteem or tendency to negative thinking; a serious loss or difficult personal relationship; medical illnesses such as cancer, stroke, heart attack, Parkinson's disease, and hormonal disorders (especially after childbirth) can all play a part. Major depressive disorders cause changes in brain structure and function.⁵

How is Depression Treated?

Conventional treatment includes a variety of medications, psychosocial therapies (cognitive/behavioral talk) or a combination of both. Electroshock therapy, now much improved, is useful for people whose depression is severe or life-threatening or who cannot tolerate antidepressants.³

Integrative therapies proven effective for mental illness include herbal supplements, hypnotherapy, music therapy, psychotherapy and yoga, but these should not be employed as the sole approach. Because there are many different causes and each person is unique in their genetic makeup, physiology and preferences, the synergy of several different approaches may be most successful.^{3,6,7}

Resources

1. *What are you so depressed about?* (2007, Feb). Grohol, J.M. <http://psychcentral.com/lib/2007/what-are-you-so-depressed-about/> [Be patient - loads slowly!]
2. A role of sunshine in the triggering of suicide. Petridou, E. *Epidemiology* 13(1), 2002: 106-9. <http://tinyurl.com/yq7ewc>
3. *Depression*. National Institute of Mental Health. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depression.cfm#ptdep1>
4. *Depression screening test*. Goldberg, I. <http://psychcentral.com/depquiz.htm>
5. [PET scan of depressed and recovered brain]. NIH Senior Health. <http://tinyurl.com/3yym9o>
6. *Depression*. MedlinePlus webpage with many links to quality, current information from reputable sources. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/depression.html>
7. *Integrative alternatives for depression, bipolar disorder*. (2007, May) [Please scroll down] <http://blog.naturalstandard.com/>