

Mental Health Awareness: Depression

Depression is a serious medical condition that affects the body, mood, and thoughts, according to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

While some individuals suffering from depression are reluctant to seek professional help due to the perceived “stigma” associated with mental health disorders, it is important to know that depression is one of the most effectively treated mental health conditions. There are a variety of treatment options available.

Clinical Depression

Clinical depression, also referred to as major depression, is different from moments of feeling sad. Everyone experiences periods of feeling ‘blue’ associated with life events. However, clinical depression is defined by recognizable symptoms. These symptoms may include:

- Feelings of sadness, emptiness or irritability
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Change in weight or appetite
- Changes in sleeping pattern
- Feeling guilty, hopeless, or worthless
- Inability to concentrate, remember things, or make decisions
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Restlessness or decreased activity
- Physical aches and pains
- Thoughts of death or suicide

The presence of five or more of these symptoms may indicate clinical depression.

Other Types of Depression

Clinical depression is only one type of depressive disorder. Other types include:

- **Seasonal affective disorder (SAD):** a type of depression related to the seasons, generally winter. While symptoms of SAD can be severe, it is usually temporary and generally improves as the amount of full-spectrum light increases.
- **Dysthymia:** a chronic but less severe form of depression. Symptoms can linger for long periods of time and keep one from functioning at their best.
- **Bipolar disorder:** a serious illness which causes severe mood swings between periods of excitability (“highs”) and sadness (“lows”). These highs and lows are referred to as episodes of mania and depression. If left untreated, mania may become so severe that one can become out of touch with reality.

Treatment

Treatment varies depending on the type of depression, but in most cases it is very effective. Treatment can include psychotherapy, anti-depressant medication or a combination of both. In addition, most mental health clinicians recognize the importance of regular aerobic exercise and a well-balanced diet in reducing the symptoms of depression.

Help and More Information

If you or someone you know is experiencing signs of depression, your employee assistance program or healthcare professional can help with identifying the next step. If you feel there is immediate need for intervention such as with thoughts or signs of suicide, call 911 or the suicide hotline at 1.800.784.2433 or 1.800.273.8255 (Press 2 for Spanish). You can also visit the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline online at: <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

To speak with an EAP professional, please call: 800.327.2384

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