

# DEPRESSION

*A Mental Health Educational Series brought to you by:  
Innovative Psychological Consultants*

## Description

There are a few different types of depression. Major Depression is where people will have many or most of the symptoms listed below consistently for at least a two week period of time, however many people have been dealing with it for several months or longer before taking action. Dysthymia manifests fewer symptoms, but often lasts for two or more years. Bipolar disorder consists of cyclical changes from depressive states to manic states and information specific to bipolar depression is available.

## Symptoms & Features

A thorough mental health diagnostic evaluation should be sought if 4-5 of the following symptoms are persisting for two or more weeks. 1) depressed (sad or empty) mood most of the day, 2) loss of interest or pleasure in usually enjoyable activities, 3) appetite/weight gain or loss, 4) disturbed sleep (insomnia or excess sleep), 5) lowered energy level/fatigued, 6) Restlessness or feeling slowed down, 7) feelings of worthlessness or excess guilt, 8) indecisiveness or lack of concentration, 9) suicidal thoughts or feelings.

Unlike strep throat or diabetes, there is no laboratory test to prove whether a person has depression, which is why it is so important to be assessed by a specialist. There is no one single cause of depression. Common factors include: Genetic factors play a role and certainly having depression in your family puts you at higher risk for developing depression. Biochemical factors are known to be a factor and the dysregulation of neurotransmitters like serotonin and norepinephrine are often associated with depression. Environmental stressors often play a role in the onset or persistence of depression. Events such as loss of a job, divorce, or even events from the past such as bullying or abuse could be factors in depression. Personality factors such as perfectionism, passivity, conflict avoidance and others can also play a role in depression. Most research suggests there is a combination of both biological and environmental factors in many cases of depression.

## Treatment

Generally depression is treated with anti-depressant medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of both. The best course of treatment for each person is something that should be discussed with your physician or mental health therapist. The type and severity of depression are often factors in determining the best course of treatment. Anti-depressant medications are designed to target the neurotransmitter dysregulation, whereas psychotherapy often focuses on environmental/social stressors and personality attributes that may be factors in the depression. Occasionally family or couples therapy may be used, especially if depressive factors are connected to relationship problems. In most cases, mild to moderate depression it can be treated on an out-patient basis. However, if depression has become severe or there is risk of suicidality, partial or in-patient hospitalization may be needed.

## What Can I Do To Help Myself

If you have many or most of the depression symptoms, or at anytime have suicidal thoughts, you should see a healthcare professional right away. It is important not to ignore symptoms that persist for more than 5-6 weeks. This often leads to mild depression becoming moderate or severe over time. You should get assessed one of the clinicians at I.P.C. who can assist in making a diagnosis and figure out the best course of treatment. In addition, you can read about depression and its treatment. You can join a support group, or talk with family and friends that you trust. Learning to manage stress, find activities that help you relax, and utilizing social supports can help alleviate some symptoms and are good preventative measures against depression.