

DEPRESSION AND COLLEGE STUDENTS

Answers to College Students' Frequently Asked Questions About Depression

Q: WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

A: Besides seeing a doctor and a counselor, you can also help your depression by being patient with yourself and good to yourself. Don't expect to get better immediately, but you will feel yourself improving gradually over time.

- ◆ Daily exercise, spending time outside in nature and in the sun, and eating healthy foods can also help you feel better.
- ◆ Get enough sleep. Try to have consistent sleep habits and avoid all-night study sessions.
- ◆ Your counselor may teach you how to be aware of your feeling and teach you relaxation techniques. Use these when you start feeling down or upset.
- ◆ Avoid using drugs and at least minimize, if not totally avoid alcohol.
- ◆ Break up large tasks into small ones, and do what you can as you can, try not to do too many things at once.
- ◆ Try to spend time with supportive family members or friends, and take advantage of campus resources, such as support groups or student activities. Talking with your parents, guardian, or other students who listen and care about you gives you support.
- ◆ Try to get out with friend and try fun things that help you express yourself. As you recover from depression, you may find that even if you don't feel like going out with friends, if you push yourself to do so, you'll be able to enjoy yourself more than you thought.

Remember that, by treating your depression, you are helping yourself succeed in college and after graduation.

Q: WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS FOR SUICIDE?

A: Depression is also a major risk factor for suicide. The following are some of the signs you might notice in yourself or a friend that may be reason for concern.

- ◆ Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
- ◆ Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or buying a gun.
- ◆ Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- ◆ Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain.
- ◆ Talking about being a burden to others and that others would be better off if one was gone.
- ◆ Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs.
- ◆ Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly.
- ◆ Giving away prized possessions.
- ◆ Sleeping too much or too little.
- ◆ Withdrawing or feeling isolated.
- ◆ Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge.
- ◆ Displaying extreme mood swings.

Q: WHAT SHOULD I DO IF SOMEONE I KNOW IS CONSIDERING SUICIDE?

A: If you know someone who is considering suicide, do not leave him or her alone. Try to get your friend or loved one to seek immediate help from his or her doctor, school counselors, or the nearest emergency room, or call 911. Remove any access he or she may have to firearms or other potential tools for suicide, including medications. You can also call to seek help as soon as possible by calling the Helpline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). You can also text the Helpline by texting "icare" to 898211.

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FEELING MOODY, SAD, OR GROUCHY? WHO DOESN'T ONCE IN A WHILE?

College is an exciting time, but it can also be very challenging. As a college student, you might be leaving home for the first time, learning to live independently, taking tough classes, meeting new people, and getting a lot less sleep. Small or large setbacks can seem like the end of the world, but these feelings usually pass with a little time.

But if you have been feeling sad, hopeless, or irritable for at least 2 weeks, you might have depression. You're not alone. Depression is the most common health problem for college students. You should know:

- ◆ Depression is a medical illness.
- ◆ Depression can be treated.
- ◆ Early treatment is best.
- ◆ LATI offers free mental health services to students.

Q: WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

A: Depression is medical illness with many symptoms, including physical ones. Sadness is only a small part of depression. Some people with depression may not feel sadness at all, but be more irritable, or just lose interest in things they usually like to do. Depression interferes with your daily life and normal function. Don't ignore or try to hide the symptoms. Depression is not a character flaw, and you can't will it away.

Q: ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF DEPRESSION?

A: Yes. The most common depressive disorders include, major depression (a discrete episode, clearly different from a person's usual feeling and functioning), persistent depressive disorder (a chronic, low-grade depression that can get better or worse over time), and psychotic depression (the most severe, with delusions or hallucinations). Some people are vulnerable to depression in winter (seasonal affective disorder), and some women report depression in the week or two prior to their menstrual period (premenstrual dysphoric disorder).

Q: WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION?

A: If you have been experiencing any of the following signs and symptoms nearly every day for at least 2 weeks, you may have major (sometimes called "Clinical") depression:

- ◆ Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- ◆ Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- ◆ Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- ◆ Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- ◆ Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- ◆ Appetite and/or unwanted weight changes
- ◆ Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- ◆ Restlessness, irritability
- ◆ Persistent physical symptoms, such as muscle pain or headaches

Not everyone who is depressed experiences every symptom. *If any of these symptoms is interfering with your functioning-or if you having thoughts that life is not worth living or ideas of harming yourself-you should seek help immediately; it is not necessary to wait 2 weeks.*

Q: IF I THINK I MAY HAVE DEPRESSION, WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

A: *If you have symptoms of depression that are getting in the way of your ability to function with your studies and your social life*, ask for help.

Depression can get better with care and treatment. Don't wait for depression to go away by itself or think you can manage it all on your own, and don't ignore how you're feeling just because you think you can "explain" it. As a college student, you're busy—but you need to make time to get help. If you don't ask for help, depression may get worse and contribute to other health problems, while robbing you of the academic and social enjoyment and success that brought you to college in the first place. It can lead to "self-medication" with high-risk behaviors with their own serious consequences, such as binge drinking and other substance abuse and having unsafe sex. Early treatment is best and depression is treated through talk therapy and/or medication.

Q: WHAT ARE "CO-OCCURRING" DISORDERS?

A: *Depression can occur at the same time as other health problems*, such as anxiety, an eating disorder, or substance abuse. It can also occur with other medical conditions, such as diabetes or thyroid imbalance. Certain medications—for example, those for the treatment of severe acne—may cause side effects that contribute to depression.