Depression

Nearly ten percent of the population suffers from some form of depression in any one-year period. This clinical depression is not a “blue mood” which can come and go. It is not a condition of personal weakness from which people should “pull themselves together” or will themselves to get better. Depression is a serious medical illness that involves the entire body-thoughts, activity, behavior, mood, and physical health. Without treatment symptoms can last for weeks or even years and a persons’ ability to function within a family, at school or in a workplace can be significantly impaired.

Types of Depression

There are three main forms of depressive illness. Major depression results in a disabling and often recurrent state where the person has significant difficulty functioning in most areas of their life. A less severe form of depression, dysthymia, creates a chronic and persistent state in which the person experiences little pleasure or good feelings and expends a great deal of energy in order to function. The third form of depression is now called bipolar disorder and was formerly known as manic depressive illness. This is a cyclic illness with alternating highs (mania) and lows (depression). The mood changes may be gradual over longer periods of time or may switch dramatically and rapidly. The “low” period would look just like a depression. The manic phase would include symptoms such as overactivity, excessive talkativeness, irritability, decreased need for sleep, grandiosity, racing thoughts, inappropriate social behavior or poor judgement.

Symptoms of Depression

A list of the major symptoms of depression is included below. Not all symptoms are experienced by everyone and the severity can vary from person to person and with different episodes. Thoughts of death or suicide can occur. If you or someone you care about is thinking or talking about suicide, you should immediately seek professional help.

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being “slowed down”
- 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

- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain

Causes of Depression

Scientific research has established that depression is a biological brain disorder. However, there is no single cause of depression; psychological, biological and environmental factors may all contribute to the development of depression. Depression may run in families but not everyone in a particular family will develop the illness. Women are more prone to develop depression, which may point to hormonal factors.

Treatment

Physical causes for depression should always be ruled out before treatment is considered. Illnesses such as thyroid disease can mimic depression and must be treated specifically. An evaluation by your primary care physician should be completed. If an underlying medical illness is not found, then an evaluation by a mental health professional is indicated.

There are a variety of excellent and appropriate treatments for depression. For milder forms of depression psychotherapy without medication has been helpful. Cognitive therapy has been especially effective for many people. Depending on the assessment and what has been successful, medication may be recommended. This is especially true for serious depression and bipolar disorder. Light therapy for seasonal mood disorder is also helpful for many people.

It is important to work with behavioral health professionals who can specifically assess your situation and tailor treatment to your particular needs. Please call CONCERN at 513-891-1691, or 800-642-9794 outside the Cincinnati area, for confidential assistance with assessment, short term counseling or referral to an appropriate treatment provider in your insurance network.

References and Websites

Book List:

Help Me, I'm Sad: Recognizing, Treating and Preventing Childhood and Adolescent Depression by David Fassler
The Feeling Good Workbook by David Burns
Feeling Good by David Burns
Happiness is a Choice by Minirth and Meier
How to Make Your Life Work, or Why Aren't You Happy? by Burhan
The Depression Workbook by Copeland

Websites:
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)
http://www.aacap.org/cs/child_and_adolescent_depression_resource_center/faqs_on_child_and_adolescent_depression

Fact sheets on many topics including depression in children and adolescents
American Psychological Association
http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/depression.html

Depression fact sheet and the role of therapy in the treatment of depression
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
http://www.nami.org/helpline/depress.htm

Diagnosis and treatment of depression
National Institute of Mental Health
http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depression.cfm

Definitions, diagnosis and treatment of depression
Depression after Delivery; symptoms and treatment of postpartum depression
http://www.depressionafterdelivery.com/

Depression Screeners:
http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org
http://www.depression-screening.org