

## DEPRESSION AND ITS SYMPTOMS

Everyone feels down sometimes. However, there is a difference between feeling down and being truly depressed. Depression is common. As many as one in four people will suffer from depression at some time. Over 17 million Americans suffer from depression. It is the country's most severe mental illness according to the National Institute of Mental Health. Depression often occurs in people with severe health problems, such as heart disease or AIDS. Teenagers and older adults may be at high risk. It's more common in women than men but can affect anyone at any age. Depression often runs in families. Only 1/3 of the people suffering from this condition seek treatment. When treated, 80-90% could be helped by therapy and new antidepressant drugs.

Even though depression is common, most people do not seek help for it. People often blame themselves for feeling bad and do not let their families or doctors know how they feel. Many people have "down" periods when they lose a family member, job or have a broken relationship. Most people adjust to this loss within a few months. However, some people do not bounce back or begin to experience symptoms for a long time.

There are several signs of depression. You may be depressed if you:

- feel sad or empty
- have lost your sense of enjoyment or fun
- have lost weight without dieting
- have trouble sleeping
- worry -insignificant things are magnified and personalized
- feel either restless or really slowed down
- feel like you have no energy
- wants to isolate
- disinterest in their personal appearance
- feel worthless or guilty
- indecisiveness
- medical problems that cannot be found
- have trouble concentrating-forgetfulness
- lose interest in sex
- less communication and more silence in relationships
- self-accusing thoughts
- anger, irritability and fatigue
- think a lot about death

Even doctors don't always pick up on the above symptoms. It is important to seek help if you see several of those symptoms in your life. Depression is a physical illness as well as a psychological one. It makes you feel bad physically, but the problems start with your emotions. Do not expect yourself to "snap out of it." A mental health provider skilled in cognitive therapy may help you feel better. Or, you may need a medication. There are many new medications that have few side effects and work quickly. Many times, a combination of medication and psychotherapy can help you get well quickly and stay well.

If you see these symptoms in a friend or loved one, talk to the person and seek professional help. Provide support. Depression is crippling and with proper treatment, a person can recover and return to healthy, productive living.