



Depression



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In case of any discrepancy or inconsistency, the English version shall prevail.

What is Depression?

The characteristics of a person with depression include persistent depressed mood, lack of interest or motivation, and negative thinking. Hence, a person's functioning, including work, school life, family and personal relationships are significantly affected.

What are the causes of Depression?

- Genetic factors
Studies showed that family members of people with depression have a higher chance of developing the illness.
- Biological factors
Apart from the role of neurotransmitters, other physiological conditions such as hypothyroidism, systemic lupus erythematosus, and effects of drugs and alcohol also contribute to the development of depression.
- Personality factors
People who are easily anxious, inflexible, and perfectionistic are more prone to develop depression.
- Environmental and societal factors
Daily life stressors, such as family and interpersonal difficulties, work or academic stress, financial burden and chronic illnesses can contribute to depression.

How do I know if I have Depression?

When we experience frustrations in life, such as loss of relationships, unemployment, death of family members, it is normal for us to feel sad, disappointed or frustrated. However, if we experience 5 or more of the following symptoms that persist for more than 2 weeks, and are significantly affecting the normal functioning like work and social relationships, there is a possibility of having a depressive disorder. Professional help should be sought.

1. Depressed mood
2. Loss of interest or pleasure in normally enjoyable activities
3. Significant decrease or increase in weight or appetite
4. Sleep disturbance (insomnia or excess sleep)
5. Restlessness or slowed response
6. Fatigue or lack of energy
7. Feeling of worthlessness or excessive self-blame
8. Difficulties with concentration or making decision
9. Repeatedly thinking about death or suicidal ideation

What is the course of Depression?

The course of illness varies individually. People with depression usually recover after receiving drug treatment for 6 months to a year. However, studies showed that a portion of people had a chance of relapse. Therefore, people with depression and their family members should be aware of the signs of relapse (e.g. insomnia for unknown reason, and depressed mood), so that treatment can be sought promptly.

What are the treatments for Depression?

1. Drug treatment

Drug treatment can alleviate depressive symptoms in 3 to 4 week's time, and is therefore the most effective treatment for severe depression.

Medications include :

- a) Antidepressants which are used to regulate the level of neurotransmitter.
- b) Anti-anxiolytics which are used to relieve anxiety symptoms associated with depression.

2. Psychological treatment

Cognitive behavioral therapy has been proved to be effective in the treatment of depression. Interventions include changing the person's negative thinking and behavioural pattern, so that the people can cope with one's problems more objectively and effectively.

3. Repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation

Usually considered when the patient has suboptimal response to pharmacological treatment. Trains of electromagnetic pulses are delivered to the brain. No anaesthetic agent is needed. A course usually comprises 20 to 30 sessions.

4. Electroconvulsive therapy

Electroconvulsive therapy will be considered and applied to severely depressed persons who are not responsive to medication and psychological treatment, and who are so severely ill that their own lives are in danger. Persons will be anesthetized and administered electric shock. The course of treatment depends on individual situation.

How can I help others manage Depression?

1. Offer understanding and support to individuals with depression, and encourage them to share their feeling and difficulties with others.
2. Provide a peaceful and comfortable environment to them, and support them to arrange a structured daily schedule.
3. Encourage them to maintain a reasonable level of social interactions with others.
4. Help them to gain more understanding of his or her course of illness, and to encourage them to seek treatment from mental health care professionals.

Pay attention to any changes in mood and mental state of individuals with depression. If any self-harming behaviors or abnormal behavior are noted, one should seek help from health care professionals as soon as possible.