

DEPRESSION- A SLOW POISON

Throughout the course of our lives, we all experience episodes of unhappiness, sadness, or grief precipitated by unexpected events like failure in exams, rejection by loved one, death of a close one, personal tragedy or difficulty such as divorce, loss of a job, etc and may feel depressed (some people call this "the blues").

Most of us are able to cope with these and other types of stressful events. Over a period of days or weeks, majority of us are able to return to our normal activities. This is called Normal Reactive Depression.

NORMAL REACTIVE DEPRESSION IS DIFFERENT FROM MEDICAL DEPRESSIVE ILLNESS:

Normal Reactive Depression:

- Requires no treatment.
- Just assurances, supportive empathy and encouragement would be useful.
- It does not affect day to day activities and routine life.
- People bounce back within a few days.

Medical Depressive Illness:

- It is not a normal variation of mood.
- The symptoms of this disease last for weeks and months and the person suffers a lot affecting their regular pattern of living.
- It is the illness that affects or changes our thoughts, moods, behavior, activity, attitude, habits and personality from what we normally are.
- Some neurotransmitters like Serotonin, Norepinephrine and Dopamine are less in quantity in some parts of the brain leading to dysfunction of the brain's neural circuits.

When one meets their doctor, they usually complain of:

- Headache, back pain, body pains and pains in other parts of the body especially hands and legs.
- Weakness despite eating well especially in the hands and legs.
- Tiredness despite doing regular work.

- Sleep disturbances - difficulty in falling asleep or dissatisfaction in sleep.
- Decreased appetite.
- Gastric problems like acidity, constipation and bowel problems

Other psychological symptoms include:

- Constantly feeling sad or depressed.
- Loss of interest in job - leading to decreased efficiency, changing jobs and in some job loss; loss of interest in housework - leading to unclean, unkempt house, delays in washing clothes and dishes and cooking food; loss of interest in day to day activities like brushing teeth, bathing, wearing non-ironed clothes and lacking interest in appearance.
- Feeling tired most of the time despite doing regular or less than regular work leading to postponement of regular work, delayed bill payments and procrastination.
- Lack of enjoyment or pleasure in activities than before leading to dropping of hobbies, avoiding socialization, going out or watching movies.
- Feeling lazy, lethargic and being slow leading to postponement of work.
- Decreased concentration leading to memory problems and forgetfulness leading to poor academic performance or accidents.
- Decreased confidence, self-esteem, and self-worthiness or feeling inferior to others.
- Become indecisive, fickle-minded, dependent, unable to organize, plan etc.
- Thoughts that other people are bad, thinking bad about themselves or ignoring them and will not help them.
- Thoughts of worthlessness, being a burden to family members, unworthy of love of near and dear ones.
- Thoughts that the world is a bad place, full of negativity etc.
- Thoughts of guilt, self hate and frustration.
- Thoughts that current situation will not improve in future, hopelessness, helplessness and thoughts of being alone in the whole world.
- Decreased initiation, motivation or enthusiasm than before.
- More irritability, anger, explosive behavior than before.
- Sleep disturbances like difficulty in falling asleep leading to internet surfing or watching TV (channel surfing), waking up early or late, wanting to sleep more and feeling dissatisfied with the sleep.
- Appetite disturbances(change in eating habits) - not interested in eating or eating more than usual or even late night snacking
- All these thoughts lead to sleep medication abuse, alcohol misuse, headaches/backaches (unexplained/no clear medical cause) and pain killer abuse, antacid abuse etc.
- Ideas, thoughts, plans of wishing to die, suicide harming oneself, suicidal attempts in severe patients.

Treatment includes homoeopathic medicines and counseling or psychotherapy including other treatments like Cognitive behavior therapy, supportive therapy.

FIVE WAYS TO FIGHT DEPRESSION

Depression affects one out of five Indians and is becoming increasingly more common. While a lot of this has to do with ubiquitous and unavoidable factors such as stress, fast paced lives and changing value systems, **there are a few factors which can be modified with a little effort, to promote one's mental health and protect oneself from depression.**

1. **Eat Right:** A proper diet can go a long way in protecting one from depression. A hearty breakfast is extremely important.
2. **Sleep in Plenty:** Sleeping for at least 6-8 hours per day is essential to keep up the body and mind's defenses against all sorts of ill effects.
3. **Exercise:** Exercise generates endorphins (the natural feel-good chemicals manufactured by our brain) and can serve to ward off depression.
4. **Pursue Your Hobby/Be A Little Selfish:** Everyday, do at least one activity that you enjoy, purely for the pleasure you derive out of it. Spend sometime with yourself, on yourself.
5. **Reflect:** Every night, before sleeping, try and recall at least one strength/virtue you exhibited through your actions in the past 24 hours. If you can't, make sure you work towards changing that answer tomorrow.

Remember, DEPRESSION is not a matter of CHOICE... HAPPINESS is...