

## COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT DEPRESSION

**What is depression?** Depression is more than the blues or the blahs; it is more than the normal, everyday ups and downs. When that "down" mood, along with other symptoms, lasts for more than a couple of weeks, the condition may be clinical depression. Depression is a serious health problem that affects the total person. In addition to feelings, it can change behavior, physical health and appearance, academic performance, social activity, and the ability to handle everyday decisions and pressures.

**What causes depression?** We do not yet know all the causes of depression, but there seem to be biological and emotional factors that may increase the likelihood that an individual will develop a depressive disorder. Research over the past decade strongly suggests a genetic link to depressive disorders; depression can run in families. Difficult life experiences and certain personal patterns, such as difficulty handling stress, low self-esteem, or extreme pessimism about the future, can increase the chances of becoming depressed.

**How common is it?** Depression is a lot more common than most people think. It will affect around 19 million Americans this year. One-fourth of all women and one-eighth of all men will suffer at least one episode or occurrence of depression during their lifetimes. Depression affects people of all ages but is less common for teenagers than for adults. Approximately 3 to 5 percent of the teen population experiences clinical depression every year. That means among 25 friends, 1 could be clinically depressed.

**Is it serious?** Depression can be very serious. It has been linked to poor school performance, truancy, alcohol and drug abuse, running away, and feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness. In the past 25 years, the rate of suicide among teenagers and young adults has increased dramatically. Suicide is often linked to depression.

**Are all depressive disorders alike?** There are various forms or types of depression. Some people experience only one episode of depression in their whole life, but many have several recurrences. Some depressive episodes begin suddenly for no apparent reason, while others can be associated with a life situation or stress. Sometimes people who are depressed cannot perform even the simplest daily activities — like getting out of bed or getting dressed; others go through the motions, but it is clear they are not acting or thinking as usual. Some people suffer from bipolar disorder, in which their moods cycle between two extremes — from the depths of desperation to frenzied talking or activity, or grandiose ideas about their own competence.

**Can it be treated?** Yes, depression is treatable. Between 80 and 90 percent of people with depression — even the most serious forms — can be helped. There are a variety of psychotherapies and antidepressant medications that can be used to treat depressive disorders. Some people with milder forms may do well with psychotherapy alone. Most people do best with combined treatment: medication to gain relatively quick symptom relief and psychotherapy to learn more effective ways to deal with life's problems, including depression.

***The most important step toward overcoming depression — and sometimes the most difficult — is asking for help.***