

Depression-It's not what you think...

By Gloria Saltzman

Many people think of sadness when they think of depression. However there are many symptoms that come with depression. Depression is a multi-layered experience that manifests in each individual in its own particular way as it meshes with the person's personal history and genetics. Many people who suffer from depression have a generally hopeless attitude, believing that nothing is possible, the root of this lethargy being low self esteem. Clinical depression is different than the experience of sadness caused by a singular event. It is a prolonged sadness and despair, lasting at least two weeks or longer and effects one's daily life dramatically. Often the depressed individual does not want to be with others and avoids all social contact. When there is social contact it often causes a great deal of anxiety and discomfort. There is an experience of not being able to truly be oneself, and a feeling of alienation from others.

Between 17 and 19 million Americans suffer from depression and only 23 % seek treatment. For so many people, seeking help is a sign of weakness and admitting any sort of mental or emotional struggle is often taboo because of the stigma associated with it. Depression is not a character flaw, it is an illness and with treatment it is manageable. It's not something that goes away with an attitude change or simply trying a little harder to have a better perspective. It is a disease that hinders the happiness of a full life if it goes untreated.

Psychotherapy is often the first form of treatment suggested for depression and studies show that it is quite effective. Therapy helps to clarify childhood or current

experiences that lead to the depression. Together with this understanding and tools to apply to moods when they arise, the suffering that depression causes can be alleviated. Creating healthy relationships and productive order in ones life is an important aspect of treating depression. In therapy, with support and direction, these changes are possible.

In addition to psychotherapy, there are several additional methods that can be used to treat this ailment.

Because depression has been found to sometimes be caused by a deficiency in hormones or certain brain chemicals, with the help of medication prescribed by a physician, more severe depression can be alleviated.

In the January 2005 edition of the American Preventive Medicine Journal, it was reported that studies proved that one half hour of exercise three to five times a week could be just as effective in diminishing depression as medication, plus there are additional health benefits that come with exercise.

There is some evidence that shows that an herb called St. John's Wort can be useful in lessening the symptoms of minor depression. It is not a proven therapy for major depressive episodes and it does diminish the effect of certain prescription medications.

Many conclusive studies have shown that mindfulness practices including meditation have been proven to alter the brain ones of the person practicing. When properly done, mediation can lower stress, reduce heart rates, and lower blood pressure. It can also relieve the symptoms of mild depression.

If you find yourself reading through this article and notice that the descriptions of the challenges that depressed people face are familiar to you, please don't hesitate to seek treatment. You can feel better.