

Understanding Depression

All of us experience times in our lives when we are “down,” “blue,” or “in a funk.” For many people, this does not last long, and goes away after a few days, or after taking a break, or after doing something they enjoy doing.

However, in major depressive disorder, these feelings are much more intense, and last for at least two weeks. People with clinical depression are likely to experience most of the following symptoms nearly every day:

- Feeling sad, empty, hopeless, or irritable most of the day.
- Things that used to be fun no longer bring pleasure.
- Significant changes in appetite or weight.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Feeling agitated, or moving slowly.
- A significant loss of energy.
- Strong feelings of worthlessness or guilt.
- Difficulty thinking and making decisions.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.

It is common for people to experience these symptoms from time to time, especially when experiencing significant loss or crises. However, in major depressive disorder, these symptoms take on a life of their own, and seriously interfere with your ability to function in your life, work, and relationships.

Unless they’ve been clinically depressed themselves, your friends and family will probably not understand. They will tell you to “just get over it,” or “work harder,” or “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps.” This contributes to the sense that there is something wrong with you, or that it is somehow your fault.

People with depression tend to experience a constant stream of negative thoughts. Depression hijacks your thinking in three ways:

- 1)** First of all, it sparks negative thoughts about yourself, such as, “There is something wrong with me,” or “I’m a terrible person,” or “I’m unlovable.”
- 2)** Depression also creates thoughts that the world is an unsafe place, that people are uncaring, and that nobody will ever help you.
- 3)** The third way depression alters your thinking is that it robs you of a sense of the future. When you are deeply depressed, you cannot even imagine five minutes from now, much less five years from now. If you do think about the future, it will seem like things will only get worse, and that there is no hope that things will ever get better. Because of these worries, it is also common to experience anxiety along with the depression.

Because your thinking itself becomes hijacked, it is very important to get the outside perspective and help of a therapist or counselor. Only an experienced mental health professional can determine if you have clinical depression.