



DEPRESSION

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression describes a low mood state that is usually experienced when one suffers loss, failure, disappointment or hardship.

The key symptoms of pervasive sadness and the inability to experience pleasure are often accompanied by feelings of guilt or worthlessness. Physical symptoms such as loss of energy or sleep and appetite disturbances are frequently present. Depression may be associated with anxiety, alcoholism and substance misuse. If left untreated, depression can lead to suicide and death.

WHO GETS DEPRESSION?

Depression can affect a person from any social, cultural or economic background. The onset is commonly between 20 to 40 years old. Children and the elderly can also be affected. A family history of depression puts one at a higher risk. An estimated 5.8% of the Singapore population suffers from depression.

WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION?

There are many environmental and situational factors that can affect one's mood. These factors are commonly related to relationship difficulties, financial problems or work stressors.

Research has shown that depression may involve structural, functional and neurochemical changes to the brain.

Depression can also be related to problems that arise during psychological development. Negative patterns of thinking and maladaptive thought processes are often present in depressed individuals.

HOW IS DEPRESSION TREATED?

1. Medications

Antidepressant medications can be effectively used to treat depression. They can help lift the mood and alleviate other symptoms such as poor sleep and appetite. Different types of antidepressants can be prescribed. The choice of antidepressant depends on the patient's symptoms, side effect tolerability, medication preference and the doctor's treatment plan.

Antidepressants are generally well-tolerated. Side effects that are experienced during the initial phase of treatment are usually transient. Nevertheless, patients should inform their doctor if they experience any discomfort after taking antidepressants.

2. Psychological and social interventions

Psychotherapy, or "talk therapy", can be used to treat mild to moderate depression. It can be given in combination with antidepressant therapy.

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Psychotherapy aims to address one's negative thoughts or beliefs. It provides emotional support and enables patients to better understand and deal with their problems. Examples of psychological interventions include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Psychodynamic Psychotherapy and Interpersonal Psychotherapy.

Depending on the patient's needs, some may require social interventions such as family or marital therapy. Others may benefit from financial or occupational assistance from medical social service providers.

3. Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)

ECT can be considered when other treatment options have failed, when rapid response is needed, or when the condition is severe and potentially life-threatening (e.g. severe suicidality or refusal to eat and drink).

ECT is a safe and effective form of treatment that involves the controlled induction seizures for therapeutic purposes. It is performed under general anesthesia to ensure comfortable treatment.

WAYS TO HELP YOURSELF

1. Avoid self-medicating with drugs, alcohol or cigarettes.
2. Cut down on coffee, tea and caffeinated drinks to improve sleep.
3. Maintain a healthy diet.
4. Regular exercise increases the release of endorphins which improves mood.
5. Don't allow pain to drag you down.
Seek appropriate pain treatment if necessary.
6. Take regular breaks e.g. enjoy a hot bath, listen to calming music, meditate, practise yoga.
7. Recognise that negativity is part of depression and contributes to an inaccurate view of life situations.
Hence try not to make major decisions when depressed.
8. Set simple goals.
9. Divide major tasks into smaller chunks, set priorities, and do what you realistically can.
10. Do not expect too much from yourself. This sets up situations for failure.
11. Do not engage in self-blame.
12. Seek help from friends and family

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