

A Guide for Patients and Families

Depression



All of us feel sad, frustrated, or disappointed at times, but depression refers to a more intense and pervasive feeling of great sadness that interferes with everyday tasks such as studying or working and with enjoyment of life in general.

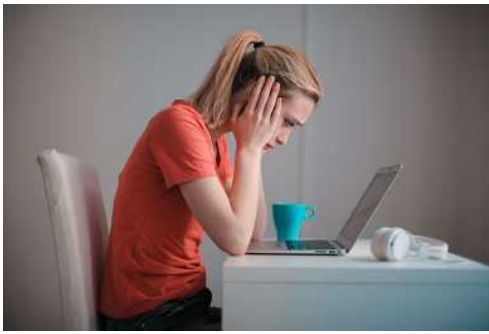
For most of us, over time we learn to overcome our problems or accept changes in our lives. But for others, the sense of despair and hopelessness can become so severe that it dominates their lives and cripples them from living a full life. It affects the way a person eats and sleeps, how one feels about oneself, and how one thinks about things. Depression of this degree is not just a passing 'blue mood,' but an illness that needs to be treated. It is not something that can be simply willed away.

Signs and symptoms

A person with depression, or Major Depressive Disorder, may experience these symptoms for more than two weeks:

- Persistent sadness; or feeling down or sense of despair.
- A loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed.
- Weight loss or weight gain; or decrease or increase in appetite.
- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep; or sleeping excessively.
- Becomes overly elated and energetic.
- Feeling agitated or restless.





- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt.
- Difficulty concentrating or having trouble thinking.
- Frequent thoughts of death or suicide.
- Feeling tired and lacking the energy.

Diagnosis & Treatment:

Medications

Antidepressant medication helps alleviate the negative impact of stress and improves mood by changing the neurotransmitters in the brain associated with depressed mood. With most of these medicines, improvement does not usually show immediately. It takes one to three weeks before changes occur. Some symptoms diminish early in treatment, others, later.



Medicine is prescribed according to everyone's symptoms, so there is no 'one size fits all' type of antidepressant. Some people respond better to one medicine than another.

Likewise, people respond to medication at different rates. To give medication time to work, it should be continued for six to 12 months (or longer) as instructed. For people who have had several bouts of depression, long-term treatment with medication is the most effective means of preventing more episodes.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is the psychological treatment where the person in distress is helped through talking with a trained and experienced therapist, as opposed to relying solely on medication.

A healthy therapeutic alliance provides a safe platform for a depressed person to work through their issues through various types of therapy tailored to the individual's needs, such as Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy.

These therapies aim to increase self-awareness of one's emotions and thought patterns, as well as improve relationships and quality of life.



Electro Convulsive Therapy

In severe depression, a course of Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) may be considered.



Care and Management:

Besides medication, psychotherapy and social support, there are additional ways a person with depression can do to take charge of their own recovery.

- Ensuring sufficient rest, proper nutrition, and physical activity.
- Set realistic expectations.
- Reframe your beliefs.
- Set firm boundaries.
- Make connections. Meet up with your friends face-to-face instead of communicating solely through social media.
- Volunteering at animal shelters, attending community or faith-based events can be good ways of staying connected with others and giving you a sense of purpose.
- Minimise rumination. Instead of dwelling on your shortcomings, set small, specific, and manageable goals.
- Remember that you have a choice, even though it may not seem that way sometimes.



It is important for people with mental health challenges to know that they are not alone. There are many things one can do to show support and care such as:

- Learn about the condition. There are many resources in the library, the Internet and community mental health awareness events.
- Let them know that you are concerned and would like to help.
- Listen without judgement.
- Give the person space and let them know that they can talk to you when they are ready to share.
- Do not belittle or minimise their struggles.
- Do not dispense advice such as to 'cheer up' or 'be strong' as this creates feelings of guilt when the person is unable to do so.
- Accompanying the person to medical appointments and being involved in their recovery plan.
- Doing favourite activities together with them.



For more information on how you can seek professional help at IMH, please call us at 6389-2000 (for enquiries), or 6389-2200 (for appointments).