

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a natural feeling that everyone experiences at some point in their life. We experience some situation or event that leaves us feeling sad and maybe down hearted for a while. But eventually we recover and life gradually returns to "normal." Usually, we don't require counseling to help our mood return to our previous level.

However, sometimes the depressed feeling seems to hang on long after any contributing situational factors have resolved. At these times it may be in our interest to seek some help from a mental health professional or our physician. Physicians often offer anti-depressant medication which may have benefit, but also usually take a little time to begin working. Frequently doctors encourage their patients to seek counseling because they are aware that the depressed state has been present for some time, and they would hope that counseling might help resolve the underlying causes of depression.

The symptoms of depression include feeling sad or "blue", having trouble sleeping, waking up not feeling rested, poor or excessive appetite, avoidance of friends, lack of interest in activities once found enjoyable, desire to be left alone, thoughts of self-harm, difficulty concentrating, and decreased sexual desire. In men and adolescents depression is often described as irritability and crankiness.

In counseling there are different approaches to treating depression. Many people sometimes avoid counseling because they fear that it will be a long drawn out process that will require them to go way back in time, and disclose every little thing that happened to them. This approach is popular in movies where clients are seen laying on couches, while the therapist sits idly by taking notes and saying "very interesting." However, most modern day approaches to dealing with depression are much more focused on the "here and now", and what active involvement the client can take in improving their mood.

Many therapists today offer a "cognitive-behavioral" approach which helps the client to be more aware of how their thinking may contribute to their depressed feelings. Cognitive therapy is an approach that has been shown to be quite effective in a fairly short amount of time, and clients are often surprised how helpful it can be.

Another effective strategy for overcoming depression is to engage in regular moderate exercise. A simple 30 minute walk every day has been shown to be of significant benefit to people feeling depressed. While depressed people often complain that they don't "feel" like exercising, there is much evidence that suggests that when a behavioral activity like walking is regularly engaged in, the level of depression reduces.

In some cases an effective way to treat depression is with anti-depressant medication. These types of medications usually require between two to four weeks before a therapeutic level has been established. Exploration about the effectiveness of anti-depressants should be addressed with your primary care physician or a psychiatrist.