

What is the depression? Is it a “chemical imbalance” or a psychological disturbance? Is it a character flaw or a weakness of personality? Should one blame oneself for not being able to pull self up by the boot straps?

Those are the questions that many people face on the everyday basis. The depression is very common. When it comes to clinically important, so-called Major Depression, it affects every fifth woman at least once in her lifetime. Men are more lucky and do not suffer as often; still, every tenth man struggles with this condition at some point.

What causes depression? The answer is still not clear. There is definitely a genetic predisposition. It does run in the families. However, people inherit predisposition, not pre-determination. Even if you have genes making you vulnerable to the depression, it does not necessarily have to manifest itself as a clinical problem. It may, under certain circumstances. What would those be? It can be stress, a physical illness, toxic effects of medications, alcohol or drugs.

How does the depression present itself? It can come with sadness, tearfulness, the lack of joy. It can present with insomnia or sleeping too much; with appetite decrease or uncontrollable eating. Energy level and motivation frequently become affected, and the ability to get things done diminishes. Depression may present with problems concentrating and focusing, with difficulties making decisions, with feelings of inappropriate guilt.

What can be done to help the depression? There are many treatment options available. In mild to moderate cases, psychotherapy (individual or group) can be sufficient. Physical exercises can be very helpful. Herbal medications such as Saint John’s Wort sometimes are effective. Pharmaceutical drugs have been proven to work for most people with the depression. There are many of them available. The choice of the medication is determined by the therapeutic profile of a specific drug, possible side effects, personal preferences, personal history of responding to a particular drug, also family history of benefiting from and tolerating certain antidepressants. Combination treatment incorporating the life style modification, psychotherapy and medications often is the most effective option, more effective than either modality alone.

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