

Depression in the Class

The recent string of school shootings has inspired school administrators to start taking a closer look at mental illness and the dangers it causes when left unchecked. Mental illness is not static; it progresses with time. We live in an interconnected world; consequently, we do not have the luxury to look at mental illness within a vacuum or as being a personal issue. Instead, the way that mental illness affects communities must be addressed. Colleges are especially important to look at since most mental disorders manifest themselves during this stressful period of time. One of the most common ailments that affects the college population is depression. Depression differs from the typical one to two days blues and instead stretches for weeks and even years of time.

"30 percent of college students reported feeling 'so depressed that it was difficult to function,'" according to a study by the National Institute of Mental Health. The



COLUMNIST

Jeremy Bamidele

somewhere down the line.

The fact that depression is common amongst college students seems paradoxical when looking at depression as an illness that derives from sadness due to social triggers such as loneliness, after all colleges are filled with peers. However, the paradox is actually a result of the misinterpretation of the nature of depression. While mental health problems are often triggered by external factors, their persistence comes from a change in brain activity. This change in brain activity persists even when the external factors that

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American Freshman: National Norms survey of over 200,000 college students indicates that mental health in colleges is at its lowest point since the organization began obtaining data over 25 years ago. This is especially troubling because the long term consequences of early onset depression are more severe than those of late-onset depression. Early onset depression can halt developmental changes from occurring leading to underdevelopment in all areas of life. Over fifty percent of those who suffer one lapse of depression will suffer another one and the chances of developing chronic depression increases with each episode. Early onset depression is a predictor of other potentially more serious mental disorders developing

triggered the depression are removed.

While predispositions to depression are often genetic there are ways to prevent the likelihood of developing depression and the slew of mental disorders that can result from it. One is the maintenance of one's overall health through diet and regular exercise. Exposure to sunlight can also help ward off depression. Depression rates are highest in countries with shorter sunlight hours. Many depressive states actually come from magnesium deficiency. A diet high in magnesium is not only shown to prevent the onset of depression but actually reverse its effects once it has begun. Avoiding stressful situations is one of the best ways to prevent the onset of depression and other mental disorders.

Asthma

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- Discuss your child's asthma triggers and steps to reduce them in the classroom.
- Ask about the school's asthma emergency plan, and if coaches, teachers and staff are trained in how to recognize asthma symptoms and respond to a breathing emergency. All 50 states and the District of Columbia allow children to self-carry and use their asthma inhalers while at school. Asthma can be fatal and you never know when asthma symptoms may occur. Discuss the policies and practices to ensure immediate access to your child's asthma medication while at school.

Step 3 - Schedule an Asthma Check-up

Each school year should begin with a visit to your child's healthcare provider for an asthma check-up. It's a good time to make sure your child is on the right amount of medicine for their asthma, to fill out any forms required by the school and to create an asthma management plan.

- It's important that your child has an updated asthma action plan on file at school and one at home and has been trained to use the prescribed medicines and devices. Visit how to make your medical visits more satisfying to find helpful hints on how to talk to your child's healthcare provider.
- If your child uses a spacer or valved-holding chamber or a peak flow meter, ask your healthcare provider for a prescription for two; one can be kept at home and one at school. A peak flow meter at school will help the school nurse assess your child's asthma symptoms.
- Asthma medicine only works if it is taken correctly. Your healthcare provider can teach your child the correct way to hold and inhale the medicine. Visit www.lung.org/asthmameds to watch how-to videos for using inhalers.
- Staying active is especially important in kids with asthma. Discuss the types of physical activity and sports your child

wants to play and the steps to take to avoid symptoms while exercising. Follow these steps to help your child stay active with asthma.

Step 4 - Develop an Asthma Action Plan

An asthma action plan is a written worksheet created by your healthcare provider and tailored to your child's needs.

- The plan includes a list of your child's asthma triggers and symptoms, the names of their medicines and how much medicine to take when needed. The plan also explains the steps to manage an asthma episode and a breathing emergency.
- An asthma action plan should always be on file in the school nurse's office and easily accessible to anyone who may need to help your child use his or her inhaler.
- Make sure teachers, coaches, after-school care providers and even school bus drivers have a copy.
- Keep a copy for yourself to help manage your child's asthma symptoms when at home.

Step 5 - Get a Flu Shot

On average, 1 out of 5 Americans suffer from influenza (flu) every year. Respiratory infections such as the flu are one of the most common asthma triggers.

- Remember, the flu shot is safe for people with asthma.
- The best way to protect your family from the flu is for everyone over the age of 6 months to get vaccinated.

Have Questions? The American Lung Association's HelpLine is staffed by Registered Respiratory Therapists and Registered Nurses who are ready to answer questions regarding asthma, lung health, and provide resources to help smokers quit. Call 1-800-LungUSA (1-800-586-4872).

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