

Exploring depression



Nearly everyone has dealt with a life-changing event that brings about feelings of sadness. But some people struggle to enjoy normally happy situations. When these feelings do not go away on their own, they may indicate the presence of depression.

Major depression is one of the world's most common mental

disorders. The World Health Organization offers that major depression also carries the heaviest burden of disability among mental and behavioral disorders. People often do not realize they're suffering from a depressive episode, and as a result, many never seek or receive the care they need.

According to "The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders," major depression is characterized by depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure and at least four other symptoms. These may include problems with self-image, sleep, energy, ability to function, and changes in appetite.

The National Institute of Mental Health says that, as of 2013, an estimated 15.7 million adults aged 18 or older in the United States had at least one major depressive episode in the past year. Depression is far-reaching and more common than one may imagine. Oftentimes, however, people delay seeking treatment because of embarrassment or the stigma that surrounds a mental illness diagnosis.

The NIMH indicates that women are 70 percent more likely than men to experience depression during the course of their lifetimes, largely due to hormones.

Elevated rates of depression among women also may be due to the fact that they tend to be more vocal and proactive in seeking help.

According to Gail Lovallo, LCSW, owner of Peaceful Living Counseling Services, LLC, depression can be linked to any number of factors. Depression may result from a particularly traumatic episode in one's life and often accompanies post-traumatic stress disorder. Individuals can become depressed when diagnosed with a disease. Women may experience post-partum depression after childbirth. A considerable percentage of people experience depression when seasons change, and that could be caused by the reduction of exposure to natural sunlight when fall gives way to winter. Seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, is often more common the farther north one lives.

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