



MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

DEPRESSION

Depression is one of the most common mental health problems in the United States, affecting more than 9.5% of American adults. While common, it is never a ‘normal’ part of life – it is a serious health problem that can affect a person’s ability to work or to have satisfying personal relationships.

Untreated depression can lead to a host of problems in a person’s life – ranging from displeasure with life, divorce, substance use, unemployment or problems at work and even suicide. In fact, more than 90% of people who complete suicide have a mental health problem, often depression.

There is no single cause of depression. It often involves the interaction of several biological, psychological and social factors. Some people may become depressed after a distressing event, such as the loss of a loved one or job, development of a chronic physical illness or disability, or having a baby (known as post-partum depression). Regardless of which factors contribute to a person’s depression, changes in hormone production or natural brain chemicals, called neuro-transmitters, cause the symptoms. These chemicals send messages from one nerve cell to another in the brain. When a person becomes depressed, the brain may have fewer of certain of these chemical messengers, such as serotonin, which regulates mood.

Depression can happen to anyone. While women experience depression nearly twice as often as men do, it can happen to anyone, at any age and of any race or ethnicity.

Symptoms and warning signs of depression include:

- Sad mood
- Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities once enjoyed
- Fatigue
- Loss of confidence or poor self-esteem
- Feelings of guilt
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Slowed movement or agitation
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- Changes in eating habits/weight
- Thoughts of death and/or suicide

A few common treatments include:

- Cognitive behavioral therapy, psychotherapy and other “talk” therapies
- Antidepressant medications
- Self-help and support strategies, such as support groups

Depression is one of the most treatable mental disorders – treatment works more than 80% of the time. If you or a loved one shows signs of depression, seek help from your community behavioral healthcare center.

Visit www.thenationalcouncil.org to find a community behavioral health center near you.