

Carol Swersky Warner, MA, LMFT
Counseling and Psychotherapy Services
0189 JW Dr., Suite 5, Carbondale, CO 81623
(970) 920-7683, fax # 963-9411; carol@sopris.net,
carolgracecounseling.com

DEPRESSION

What is Depression?

Depression is a mood disorder with widely-varying symptoms from one person to another. It is a complex problem that can affect many different aspects of the sufferer's life:

Body: insomnia, fatigue, appetite disturbances, diminished sex drive, and anxiety symptoms (ie, rapid heart beat, dry mouth, tense muscles)

Mind: Interference of ability to think clearly, notice and remember details, and make good decisions. Critical and negative thinking, ruminating.

Emotions: feelings of sadness, despair, guilt, worthlessness, and apathy.

Behavior: alcohol or drug abuse, suicide attempts, other socially or self-destructive behaviors.

Interpersonal (social and family) relationships: aggression, withdrawal, marital and family distress.

Major Depressive Disorder: "Unipolar," most common, affects only one end of the mood continuum, depression. When chronic is termed "dysthymia."

Manic-depressive illness: "Bipolar", affects both ends of the mood continuum, depression and euphoria, or mania.

How Do You Know When to Seek Help?

In general, you should seek help when depression is starting to affect your life (your family, your job, your outlook) in negative ways, and you

are not very clear about what you need to do to prevent things from getting worse. Seek help before things get really bad. Specific factors to consider:

- 1. Suicidal thoughts or feelings.*
- 2. Acute depression turning chronic.*
- 3. Lifestyle disruption (health, work, relationships, school, activities)*
- 4. Reality testing (Does what you're thinking make sense? You may need an objective person to help determine this.)*

Helping Yourself:

- ◆ Do not set yourself difficult goals or take on a great deal of responsibility.*
- ◆ Break large tasks into small ones, set some priorities, and do what you can as you can.*
- ◆ Do not expect too much from yourself too soon as this will only increase feelings of failure.*
- ◆ Try to be with other people; it is usually better than being alone.*
- ◆ Participate in activities that may make you feel better.*
- ◆ You might try mild exercise, going to a movie, a ballgame, or participating in religious or social activities.*
- ◆ Don't overdo it or get upset if your mood is not greatly improved right away. Feeling better takes time.*
- ◆ Do not make major life decisions, such as changing jobs, getting married or divorced, without consulting others who know you well and who have a more objective view of your situation. In any case, it is advisable to postpone important decisions until your depression has lifted.*
- ◆ Do not expect to snap out of your depression. People rarely do. Help yourself as much as you can, and do not blame yourself for not being up to par.*
- ◆ Remember, do not accept your negative thinking. It is part of the depression and will disappear as your depression responds to treatment.*

Depression can make you feel exhausted and helpless. You will want and probably need help from others. However, people who have never had a depressive disorder may not fully understand its effect. They won't mean

to hurt you, but they may say and do things that do. It may help to share this with those you most care about so they can better understand.

Helping the Depressed Person:

The most important thing anyone can do for the depressed person is to help him or her get appropriate diagnosis and treatment.

The second most important thing is to offer emotional support, understanding, patience, affection, and encouragement. Engage in conversation and listen carefully. Do not disparage feelings expressed, but point out realities and offer hope. Do not ignore remarks about suicide and if necessary report them to the depressed person's therapist or appropriate authority. People are often afraid of doing this for fear of their friend or loved one's reaction - having someone be temporarily upset at you is better than having them die.

Invite the person for walks or some type of outing and activity. Encourage participation in some activity that once gave pleasure but don't push to undertake too much too soon. Diversion and company are needed, but too many demands can increase feelings of failure.

Do not accuse the depressed person of faking illness or of laziness, or expect him or her "to snap out of it." Eventually, with treatment, most depressed people do get better. Keep that in mind, and keep reassuring the person that, with time and help, he or she will feel better.

Psychotherapy and antidepressant medications are the two most commonly used treatments for managing depression. Some people use a combination of the two. People's responses vary, but these approaches hold good promise for providing relief. Depression is highly responsive to good treatment, and good treatment is available from a variety of sources.

Remember, especially if you are close to the person, their depression is not your fault and you are not responsible. Do the best you can to help and understand, but their condition is a factor from many possible sources (ie, family history, environmental factors). If you need counseling or support to help with your own feelings, get it!