

THERAPYWORKS

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BEAT DEPRESSION

What is Depression?

It is essential to recognize a problem before you can improve it. Depression is a problem that affects the lives of many people. Depression is an illness, the same way a cold or the flu is an illness. Depression is an illness associated with problems in the areas of thinking, feeling, and behavior. Depression is not the same as sadness, although people who have depression often feel sad. When a person's emotions, thoughts and behaviors are stuck in patterns that lead to losing interest in "normal" activities, relations, work and play, then a person is said to have depression.

Symptoms of Depression:

Depressed or irritable mood; loss of interest in "normal" daily demands and interests; changes in appetite, sleep patterns and/or sexual appetite; decreased energy; thoughts of worthlessness or guilt; behavioral agitation (restlessness) or retardation (inactivity); problems thinking/concentrating; recurrent thoughts of death or suicide; engaging in reckless/dangerous behavior. Sometimes depressive symptoms are quite intense (e.g. excruciating anguish) and sometimes they are less intense but quite steady and longstanding (e.g. day in and day out doldrums).

How come people get Depression?

People are imperfect creatures; we all are likely to experience a variety of illnesses throughout the course of life. Many people believe that depression is caused by having bad experiences such as critical parents, a poor marriage or financial setbacks. Although negative situations and experiences may contribute to a person being more likely to be depressed, it is very important to understand that "bad" events in life do not cause depression. If you doubt this, just think of how many bad events you and your friends have managed at one time or another without becoming depressed. If "bad" events actually caused people to be depressed just by happening, then **all** people would become depressed **each** time a bad event occurred -- and that does not happen.

People usually get depressed because of 2 reasons. The first reason has to do with biology. Some people get depressed because of chemical imbalances, or because they misuse alcohol/drugs. There are a variety of biological conditions that are associated with depression. Many people have

heard of problems such as manic-depression (bi-polar disorder) and Alzheimer's disease. These are just two types of biological problems that are generally associated with depression. The second reason that people get depressed is because they have not learned how to effectively cope with "bad" situations that happen in life. "Bad" situations do not cause depression, but if a person does not know how to handle a "bad" situation, then they may very well get depressed. When people are involved in many "bad" situations, it becomes increasingly harder to keep handling them effectively. Eventually, people who experience lots of frustrating and depriving situations often become depressed.

I am depressed! -- What do I do about it?

A good start to "beating" depression is to get a thorough medical checkup and rule out any biological abnormalities. There are 2 reasons for starting with a good medical evaluation. First, if you have a biological depression, without some kind of medical intervention (e.g. medicine), it is very unlikely that you will be able to beat your depression. Second, if you rule out biology as the main reason for your depression, you can start feeling more confident that you will be able to beat your depression if you follow certain steps that will help you change your depressed thinking, feelings and behavior. Having a thorough medical checkup will also reduce any stress you might have from not "knowing" you have a clean bill of health from your physician, or understanding all about any physical problems that you do have.

Once you have determined that your depression results from not effectively handling negative situations in your life, it's time to "Beat Depression" by increasing your ability to have self-control and tolerate problems and bad feelings. The more you are able to direct and control your thoughts, feelings and behaviors, the less often you will feel defeated and depressed. **Remember**, if you are in charge of yourself (your thoughts, feeling and behaviors) no person or situation can make you depressed.

You will "Beat Depression" by improving your thinking and behavioral management skills; this in turn will increase your overall self-control and mood.

Remember,

Feelings are like personal traffic signals; they reflect our perception of situations – content (happy), discontent (sadness, anger) or uncertain (scared). When you keep track of how you feel (your signal), it makes it much easier to plan and be in control of your reactions. When you do not keep track of your feelings, for whatever reason, you are apt to react in ways that are haphazard or out of control. If you are going to handle "bad" situations, it is important to know how you feel, and to recognize how you want to react. It is also important to learn from your mistakes, learning to change a haphazard or out of control response into a more organized response that is planned and keeps you in control.