

Is it Sadness or Depression?

BY TIM EVANS

When does feeling sad turn into depression? If I just can't seem to get my act together what does that really mean about me? Sometimes all I want to do is sleep. Am I depressed? What about these winter blues I have because it's cold and gray outside and I'm stuck inside? Many people will ask themselves these questions and others like them at sometime in their life.

health & wellbeing

Fortunately there is now much attention being paid to the subject of depression and ways to treat it. These days admitting to yourself and to others that you are suffering from depression doesn't carry the stigma it once did. There are many places to go and professional people to talk to about depression as well as many treatment options.

There is an abundance of information available on depression; much of it lists some of the most common warning signs or symptoms to watch for. Many of these symptoms taken singly do not mean someone is depressed, but taken together over an extended period of time they can be an indication of true depression. Bob Greene, a licensed clinical mental health counselor, explains that experiencing five or more of these symptoms over a two-week or longer period can be a signal that a person is clinically depressed.

Obviously, each one of these warning signs taken by itself or even in a combination with another doesn't always spell depression. For example, a person can have the flu for a week or more, be tired all the time

and have different sleeping patterns. Too much coffee can make you jumpy.

According to Greene, depression involves a distortion of thinking and feeling.

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Everyone feels sadness in his or her life; it is a normal emotion. Out of proportion feelings of sadness, however, may signal depression. Green offered the loss of a loved one as an example. It is normal to grieve and experience feelings of sadness. However, feelings such as not being able to go on or that life will never be the same could signal what is termed reactive depression, depression that comes from an event in life such as the loss of a loved one or getting fired from a job.

Another type of depression is endogenous (coming from within). This form seems to come up from nowhere. One characteristic of it is a murky feeling of general disinterest. Again, it is a distortion of our thought process.

So what does an individual do when faced with the uncomfortable question of whether they are truly suffering from depression? Greene's advice is first to "come out" to yourself and "give yourself a break." Depression is nothing to be ashamed of and it is not a sign of being a failure.

Depression is very treatable and there are many options available. The one that comes to mind for most is the prescribing of anti-depressants, including the commonly prescribed Prozac. Prozac has great results for some, not so great for others. There are other drugs on the market that work very similar but with different side effects.

There are also herbal remedies, the most prominent being St. John's Wort. This herb is being touted as the natural alternative to Prozac. St. John's Wort contains the active ingre-

redient Hypericin that may not be as potent as Prozac but studies seem to show that it has positive results with the symptoms of mild depression.

There are varying opinions on what form of the herb to take. Some say that concentrate is best, others say go for quality. It is probably a good idea to talk to a licensed naturopathic

approach to overcoming depression. "Psychosynthesis is a spiritual approach to psychology and psychotherapy. It is based in early psychoanalytical theory, but takes psychoanalysis a step further into the realm of the superconscious, the theoretical psychic structure that holds such experiences as altruistic love, joy, and serenity; states of illumination, contemplation and bliss; meaning and purpose and life direction." Gigante continues, "through the psychosynthetic approach we would diagnose the underlying issues and work them through, all the while gradually freeing up the individual's will, and energies from the higher self."

Psychosynthesis can also be used in addition to most other treatments. It "provides an outlook, maps of the psyche, that helps us to know and understand the territory we are in, and then provides techniques to

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

1. depressed mood
2. diminished interest in once enjoyed activities
3. weight loss or gain
4. change in sleep patterns; i.e. insomnia or too much sleep
5. feeling of jumpiness or feeling lethargic
6. feeling of fatigue almost everyday
7. inability to concentrate
8. thoughts of death or suicide

(Experiencing five or more of these symptoms over a two-week or longer period is a signal that a person is clinically depressed.)

doctor about questions concerning dosage and how much and what brand to take. naturopathic doctors are educated and trained along much the same lines as a medical doctor, but emphasizing on nutrition and herbs.

Michael Gigante, Ph.D. of Brattleboro, VT suggests psychosynthesis as another

help guide us through that territory."

The most common advice for someone who fears she may be suffering from depression is not to be ashamed of herself for how she feels, and to shop around for a treatment that suits her. ▼

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