

Understanding Depression FACT SHEET

OVERVIEW: Depression is a common and potentially life-threatening illness that affects both the mind and body. It is difficult to explain why people experience depression since it is a complex disease that may develop for a range of different reasons.¹ People with depression can experience a variety of symptoms. Emotional symptoms can include sadness, loss of interest in things you once enjoyed, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, restlessness and trouble concentrating or making decisions. Physical symptoms can include fatigue, lack of energy and changes in weight or sleep patterns. Additional symptoms of depression may include irritability, anxiety, pain and thoughts of death or suicide.²

INCIDENCE: Up to 19 million Americans have depressive disorders, including major depression.^{3,4} The illness can affect anyone of any age, race or ethnic group, however women are nearly twice as likely to experience depression as men.⁵ Although it is one of the most frequently seen psychiatric disorders in the primary care setting, depression often goes undiagnosed or is under-treated.⁶ This may be because patients with depression are ashamed to discuss being depressed with their physicians, or because depressed patients often present with physical symptoms rather than emotional complaints.⁷

BURDEN OF ILLNESS: Depression can have a substantial impact on an individual's ability to take care of his or her everyday responsibilities.⁸ It is among the leading causes of disability worldwide and is projected to become the second leading cause of disability by 2020.⁸ Depression can also lead to suicide, which is associated with the loss of about 850,000 lives worldwide each year.⁹ Evidence suggests that depression may increase the risk of death from other medical illness, such as stroke and cardiovascular disease.¹⁰

SYMPTOMS: Understanding that depression has a variety of symptoms may help to improve diagnosis and treatment. While depression symptoms can vary from person to person, they may include:

➤ Sadness throughout the day, nearly every day	➤ Fatigue or lack of energy
➤ Loss of interest in, or enjoyment of, your favorite activities	➤ Sleeping too much or too little
➤ Feeling of worthlessness	➤ Change in appetite or weight
➤ Excessive or inappropriate feelings of guilt	➤ Trouble concentrating
➤ Thoughts of death or suicide	➤ Feeling slowed down
➤ Trouble making decisions	➤ Restlessness

TREATMENT: While many patients respond to some form of treatment, less than 50% experience remission from all of their disease symptoms.¹¹ Patients with residual symptoms of depression were three times more likely to relapse compared to those with no remaining symptoms of the disease.¹² To achieve remission, treatment needs to address the broad spectrum of disease symptoms.¹³

Several different classes of medications have been used for the treatment of depression. These include, but are not limited to, serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) and monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs).¹⁴

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