

WARNING SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

If you have several of the following symptoms lasting for more than two weeks, you may want to discuss them with your provider.

- Lasting sadness or a sense of doom or that something is wrong. Tearfulness and frequent bouts of crying
- Irritability, anxiety, mood swings, panic attacks or severe agitation
- Increases or decreases in appetite. A craving for sweets is not unusual. Weight gain or loss can occur
- Insomnia (trouble sleeping) or sleeping, much more than usual
- Diminished interest in sex
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- Continued negative view of yourself or others, inappropriate guilt, neglect or self care and hygiene
- Difficulty thinking clearly, making decisions or concentrating
- Increased focus on pain
- Thoughts of harming yourself or others in any way



MAPS MEDICAL PAIN CLINICS | DAVID M. SCHULTZ, M.D. | MEDICAL DIRECTOR
2104 NORTHDAL BLVD. NW, SUITE 220 | MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55433
(763) 537-6000 | (763) 537-6666 FAX | (800) 775-PAIN TOLL-FREE | WWW.PAINPHYSICIANS.COM

LIVING HEALTHY WITH CHRONIC PAIN



PAIN AND SUFFERING

the link between depression and chronic pain



PAIN AND SUFFERING

THE LINK BETWEEN DEPRESSION AND CHRONIC PAIN

By Carol Ehrlichmann, PA-C

Depression and chronic pain often go hand in hand. Pain can play havoc with your emotions. One minute, you may feel fine and the next minute your world seems torn apart. The emotional strain combined with the persistent physical pain can be very difficult to handle. Studies show that up to 50% of people with chronic pain have some form of depression. An accident or fall can change your life in an instant. In the event that a tragedy causes lasting pain, it is common to feel discouraged by necessary lifestyle changes, such as diminished ability to do pleasurable physical activities like dancing, sports, hunting, fishing, etc. Furthermore, the difficulty in completing activities of daily living and the reliance on others to accomplish tasks that were once simple can be troubling. Your emotions may range from fear and frustration to anger and apathy or even extreme sadness. As you long for the life you had before pain, you may become more frustrated and angry. Pain can cause lack of energy and slowed movements and this can make you feel powerless and trapped.

What is Depression?

Depression is a potentially serious diagnosable medical illness. It isn't just feeling down, blue or bummed out. It is not simply feelings of unhappiness, sadness or even grief. Clinical depression is a collection of symptoms that persist for some time and interfere with one's basic sense of well being and ability to function in everyday life. It is a real illness that many feel is caused by chemical imbalances in the part of the brain that is responsible for mood, energy, appetite and even pain response. Another variation of depression is termed Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which we watch for in certain climates and altitudes. This type of depression is secondary to changes in light exposure. These symptoms of depression are most present during the months of the year with low light.

What Causes Depression?

Since genetics play a role in depression, you may be genetically predisposed to the chemical imbalance mentioned previously if a relative suffers from depression. Studies indicate a clustering of depression within families. Most people can remember one or more relatives who were nervous, sad, angry, etc. Tendencies also exist for related illnesses such as alcoholism and migraine headaches. Many depressed people are genetically predisposed to depression. There are chemicals in the body that cause depression to begin or persist. Stressful life events can trigger depression. Illness, injury, marriage difficulties, traumatic events such as sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse or death of a loved one can all make a person especially vulnerable to depression. Biochemical neurotransmitters such as serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine are the chemicals that transmit signals to the brain cells. They exist at different levels and act in different ways in depressed versus nondepressed people. This is the basis for the treatment with antidepressant medications which aim to correct these imbalances. Due to unfortunate social taboos, depression has not always been appropriately identified or treated in the past. While this is improving, we still fight this stigma today.

How Can We Treat Depression?

If you feel you may suffer from depression after reading this newsletter, discuss these feelings with your provider. Your family doctor may recommend counseling, medications or both. There are many old and new medications which can safely and effectively treat depression. Not all are the same and often effective treatment can take some trialing of different medication choices. These medications often work on those afore mentioned chemicals of serotonin, norepinephrine or dopamine, where others work in different ways to stabilize mood. Additionally, your primary care doctor may screen you for a variety of medical problems that can cause or worsen depression such as hypothyroidism, multiple sclerosis, lupus, Lyme disease, vitamin deficiencies, anemia, dementia and substance abuse. There are many things you can do yourself to help with the symptoms of depression. These include getting regular exercise, meditating, yoga or tai chi, paying attention to a healthy balanced diet, getting adequate amounts of good sleep, talking with friends and family about your thoughts and feelings and looking into support groups to help you find others in your situation. By doing some or all of these things, you gain some control over your depression, your pain and ultimately, your life.

