



For help call (813) 870-3344

What You Need To Know Regarding Depression

Tampa, Fla. (March, 2012). Everyone from time to time experiences temporary feelings of sadness, frustration, irritability, stress, and fatigue as part of the normal ups and downs of daily life. While this article is not intended to provide a diagnosis, it does intend to provide some basic information to assist the reader in determining if they might find it useful to talk further with a RAP representative. When you find yourself experiencing a number of the following symptoms and those symptoms are present most of the time for at least two weeks along with a depressed mood and lost interest or pleasure in your usual activities, it is a sign that you may be depressed. The symptoms must be significant enough that there is significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. Depression is a medical condition that affects persons regardless of age, race, socio-economic group, belief systems or gender. It can impact you, a family member, friend or coworker. It is not a sign of personal weakness or lack of will power. It is not a reason for shame. Rather, it is a medical condition like diabetes or high blood pressure. And like these conditions, depression can usually and should be treated.

Depression can affect your feelings, physical health, thoughts and/or your behavior. You can begin to feel overwhelmed. Symptoms may be relatively mild to severe. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, symptoms may include:

- ◆ Persistent sadness, anxiety or “empty” feelings
- ◆ Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities including hobbies and sex
- ◆ Fatigue or loss of energy
- ◆ Changes in weight or appetite (i.e., overeating or appetite loss)
- ◆ Insomnia, early morning wakefulness or excessive sleeping
- ◆ Noticeable restlessness or decreased activities
- ◆ Irritability or restlessness
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating, remembering details and making decisions
- ◆ Feelings of worthlessness or guilt and/or helplessness
- ◆ Feelings of hopelessness and/or pessimism

- ◆ Thoughts of death or suicide or suicide attempts

Persons become depressed for a variety of reasons. Depression may be caused by or occur with some medical conditions such as heart problems, stroke or hypothyroidism. Certain prescription medications, life events such as the death of a family member, divorce, loss of a job or substance abuse may also contribute to depression. Persons with a family history of depression are more likely to suffer from this condition but not everyone with such a predisposition will become depressed. Also, depression may affect someone who doesn't have a family history. Biochemical imbalances that involve neurotransmitters such as dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine may result in depression. Why depression occurs is not nearly as important as recognizing the symptoms and promptly seeking assistance. The first step is to arrange for an assessment by a qualified clinician. This can be obtained at no charge through your Resident Assistance Program (RAP). Your RAP representative is a mental health clinician experienced in doing such evaluations and helping you to develop an effective treatment plan. Depression not only affects the person suffering from the disease but also has a rippling effect on family, friends and coworkers. Others may experience anger, frustration, or fail to understand the changes a depressed individual is exhibiting. Others who work with the depressed individual may become upset because the depressed person is missing work or their performance has declined. Those suffering from depression may exhibit problems concentrating and difficulty making decisions. Also, uncharacteristic lateness, safety problems or accidents, crying spells, complaints of being tired all the time, frequent complaints of unexplained aches and pains, lack of cooperation, morale problems, and alcohol and/or drug abuse are indications that an individual may be suffering from depression

Suicide Warning Signs

Suicide can be a possibility for a person suffering from depression. Do not assume that just because they are or are not talking about it that it will not happen. Be aware of the following signs:

- ◆ The person is discussing suicide openly or is making specific plans to commit suicide
- ◆ The person is getting all of their affairs in order
- ◆ The person may give away treasured belongings
- ◆ The person has made references such as "the world would be a better place if I weren't around" or "I wish I could just disappear"
- ◆ The person may make vague references to not being around for an activity that they had planned and were looking forward to attending
- ◆ The person may make an effort to contact individuals as a way of saying goodbye to them

If you think someone may be contemplating suicide, ask them. Asking this question will not cause someone to do so. If they say “yes,” encourage them to get help on a voluntary basis immediately. If the person does not seek assistance, do not keep it a secret. You can call your RAP, local crisis line or 9-1-1 for further guidance and direction.

The key to recovery is to seek treatment. The first step is to contact your RAP so that a comprehensive assessment may be done and treatment recommendations made. Remember that the RAP is available to all residents and dependents for assessment, support and referral at no charge. The RAP is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you need help, that help is one phone call away.

RAP is a tool for personal and professional growth. Call your designated RAP line: (813) 870-3344 or (800) 343-4670 (out of area toll free).