



the portage path behavioral health reference guide to: **Depression**

Depression is more than just feeling “blue” or sad, it is a serious medical illness that can affect anyone of any age, race, or socio-economic status. Each year depression costs the nation an estimated \$43 billion dollars in medication, psychological care, and lost school hours and workdays. According to The National Institute of Mental Health more than 19 million Americans - almost one in ten adults - will experience depression this year alone.

Depression is a powerful disease that affects a person’s mood, mind, body, and behavior. A depressed person’s empty mood, negative attitude, loss of energy, and other complicated symptoms often places a strain on relationships with family, friends, and co-workers.

Signs & Symptoms

- *Appetite and weight changes (either loss or gain)*
- *Chronic aches and pains not explained by another physical condition*
- *Decreased energy, fatigue, being “slowed down”*
- *Difficulty concentrating making decisions, or remembering*
- *Feelings of hopelessness, guilt, and worthlessness*
- *Gradual loss of sexual desire*
- *Irritability or excessive crying*
- *Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities*
- *Sadness, anxiety, or “empty” feelings*
- *Sleep disturbances (insomnia, oversleeping, or waking much earlier than usual)*
- *Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts*

The National Institute of Mental Health offers the following descriptions of the three major types of depression:

- **MAJOR DEPRESSIVE ILLNESS (Unipolar or Clinical Depression):** Some or all symptoms of depression (see Signs & Symptoms) are present for at least two weeks. Episodes of the illness can occur once, twice, or several times in a lifetime.
- **DYSTHYMIA (Dysthymic Disorder):** the same symptoms are present, though milder, and last at least two years. People with dysthymia also can experience major depressive episodes, which is sometimes called a “double depression.”
- **BIPOLAR DISORDER (Manic Depression):** is not as common as other forms of depressive illness. It involves disruptive cycles of depressive symptoms that alternate with euphoria, irritable excitement or mania.

Depression can arise from a variety of psychological, physical, social, and biological causes. Things like divorce, financial problems, job stress, chronic illness, loss of a loved one, and improper level of certain chemicals in the brain are all common causes. It is not unlikely that a depressed person will also have a substance abuse problem - in many cases, the depression comes first and alcohol or drugs are then used to escape the overwhelming symptoms. Unfortunately, the substance abuse often ends up worsening the feelings of depression.



Treatments for Depression

Treatment for depression is known to be very effective - with a success rate of over 80% - but before beginning any treatment for depression, a person should have a complete physical examination and a medical history review to rule out any other causes for the symptoms that are being experienced. The most successful treatment for depression is the combination of psychotherapy and medication. Medications such as Prozac, Paxil, and Zoloft have shown significant ability to elevate a patient's mood, but they should almost always be used in combination with therapy. The American Psychological Association found that when therapy includes a clear "action plan" (for example, "homework" assignments such as journal writing, or brief art therapy sessions), the success rate can rise dramatically. Treatment for depression can be a relatively brief process. In fact, many patients have reported feeling better in just a matter of two to three weeks.

There are many types of therapy a person with depression might find helpful, such as:

- **Behavioral therapy** - attempts to change behavior rather than underlying personality, teaches new coping techniques.
- **Interpersonal therapy** - concentrates on interpersonal relationships and coping with conflicts in relationships.
- **Cognitive-behavioral therapy** - attempts to change behavior and to correct negative thinking patterns.
- **Psychodynamic therapy** - concentrates on underlying drives and desires that determine behavior.
- **Group therapy** - provides the additional support of a group, and is led by a psychotherapist.



Tips for Overcoming Depression

The University of New York Counseling Center offers the following tips on overcoming depression:

- Be aware of the cause of your depression and be optimistic about the future.
- Try to be aware of your negative thoughts and replace them with positive ideas.
- Make a weekly list of your positive accomplishments and social activities.
- Use self-relaxation techniques whenever you feel tense. (Deep breathing exercises)
- Take an active role in getting better.
- Don't give in to negative thinking.
- Focus on your positive experiences.
- Express your anger in an assertive manner.
- Exercise daily.
- Set realistic goals.
- Get socially active. (Hobbies or Volunteer Work)
- Seek professional help if symptoms persist.

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, visit our web site or call Portage Path and find out how we can help:

Web Site	www.portagepath.org
Appointments	330-253-3100 800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

Support Hotline	330-434-9144 888-434-8878
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