Depression - A Guide to Recognition and Treatment

What Is Depression?
Depression is an illness which involves a person’s mood, thinking, body functions, and actions. Changes in these areas can last for weeks or months. People become upset because depression can affect their ability to function.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression
To help you be aware of depression, the signs and symptoms are discussed below.

Mood
- Feelings of being sad, blue, “down in the dumps,” worried or depressed.
- Loss of being able to feel pleasure.
- Decreased interest in activities with family, work, recreation and sex.

Thinking
- Negative thoughts of the past, present, and future.
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of being helpless and hopeless.
- Frequent thoughts of suicide.
- Decreased ability to focus, remember, and make decisions.
- Anxiety and/or exaggerated fears.
- In severe depression, delusions (false beliefs) and/or hallucinations (unreal sights, sounds or other feelings) may occur.

Physical Functions
- Appetite changes. Weight loss may result from eating less, but depressed people may eat more and gain weight.
- Change in sleep (too much sleep or too little sleep)
- Chronic fatigue and decreased energy
- Nausea, constipation, or diarrhea
- Increased reports of aches and pains

Behavioral Changes
- Some people do not show any changes in their behavior.
- Others may show some of these:
  - Tearfulness
  - Irritability
  - Slowed movements or restless movements, such as pacing or hand wringing
  - Not being able to work or perform daily acts such as dressing, eating, or washing
- Depressed people are at risk for suicide.

Treatment of Depression
Depression responds well to treatment. Treatment depends on the type of depression, its causes, and how severe it is. Treatment may include talking to a trained expert and/or medicines, and/or ECT (electroconvulsive therapy). It may take many weeks for symptoms to start to go away. The sooner a diagnosis is made, the sooner treatment can begin and the depressed person can feel relief from the symptoms.
Phone Numbers
For more information about the treatment of depression contact:

Depression Treatment at UW Health, (608) 263-6100

National Suicide Prevention line
1-800-273-8255
1-800-799-4889

National Alliance on Mental Illness, Dane Co.
NAMI Dane County
2059 Atwood Avenue
(608) 249-7188
www.namidaneCounty.org

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2016 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4525. Summarized with permission from "Depression and Its Treatment" by Dr. John H. Greist and Dr. James W. Jefferson.