



A focus on depression

Katherine Tadolini, MD

We've all felt down in the dumps before. Things in life can happen that will make us unhappy from time to time. However, many people experience true clinical depression in their lifetimes, including 20% of all women and 10% of all men, according to Dr. Katie Tadolini, a primary care physician at Lakeside Primary Care of Washington Health System. Those who suffer from depression often find it difficult to talk about, but just like high blood pressure or diabetes, depression is a serious disease that can be treated and relieved.

So what is the difference between just feeling down and true clinical depression?

"To be diagnosed with clinical depression, one must have a period of two weeks or longer during which there is either depressed mood or loss of interest/pleasure, and at least five other symptoms that reflect a change in functioning," says Dr. Tadolini. These symptoms can include things like sleep problems, change in eating, loss of energy, problems concentrating and changes in self-image.

It is important to know the symptoms of depression so that you can identify them in yourself or a loved one. Medical professionals often use the mnemonic SIGECAPS, which stands for sleep disturbance, interest/pleasure reduction, guilt feelings or thoughts of worthlessness, energy changes and fatigue,

concentration/attention impairment, appetite/weight changes, psychomotor disturbances, and suicidal thoughts and sadness. In order to be diagnosed with depression, a person needs to have five of these symptoms.

"The big thing with depression is that it doesn't discriminate and can affect any population at any time in life," says Dr. Tadolini. Depression is slightly more common in females and seems to affect younger adults at the highest rate, but it truly is a disease that can affect anyone.

If you think you might be depressed, it is very important that you reach out to someone, preferably your primary care physician. The major barrier for many patients is that the disease itself creates a feeling of isolation and sufferers mistakenly think that they are the only one to feel this way. Dr. Tadolini always tells her depression patients that, "It's like drowning, except you see everyone around you breathing."

Though depression often seems like a hopeless disease, treatment options are abundant. Dr. Tadolini believes the best treatment option is a combination of therapy and medication. Not everyone needs medication to treat depression, but medical advancements have provided many safer and more effective options than were previously available.

It is important to know that treatment for depression is not uniform. What works for one patient may not work for another, so often a period of medication adjustments or changes may be necessary to achieve remission. In addition it can take up to 6 weeks for an antidepressant to reach peak effectiveness so it is important to be patient with the process and provide your doctor with input along the way.

Depression rarely gets better on its own, so treatment is very important. The goal of treatment is not to cure depression, but to put it in remission. Those who are susceptible to depression may experience recurrences of it throughout their lifetime, and that is why it is important to monitor symptoms and be proactive with treatment and self-care.



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If you have noticed changes in your mood that have lasted two weeks or more, talk to your primary care physician. To make an appointment at Lakeside Primary Care, please call (724) 969-1001.

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