

Understanding Depression

Student Counselling Unit
Mental Health Awareness Series

What Is Depression ?

- Depression is a persistent state of low mood where the affected individual, experiences changes in their emotional, mental and physical functioning. A person can either experience a depressive episode or be diagnosed with a depressive disorder.
- Sadness differs from depression in that it is a normal reaction to loss or setbacks in life while Depression is not just a felt emotion but interferes with our daily functioning in various aspects of our life.
- A person can still feel sad while fulfilling their day to day duties while someone who is depressed, struggles to carry out their normal activities as their functioning is impaired by their depressed state.

What Research Says

- Approximately 380 million people worldwide are living with depression.
- In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by 25%.
- Research suggests that as many as 12% of South African University students suffer from moderate to mild depression.

Types of Depressive Disorders

- **Major Depressive Disorder** : The most common type of depression attributable to significant changes in mood due to a response to life stressors, a chemical imbalance in the brain or genetic influences
- **Seasonal Affective Disorder** : A relatively rare type of depression related to the change of season. People who suffer from seasonal affective disorder may notice symptoms beginning and ending at about the same time each year.
- **Postpartum Depression**: A type of depression that occurs in the period following childbirth.

Symptom check:

**Experiencing the following symptoms consistently for a period of two weeks:*

- Depressed mood
- Increased or decreased appetite
- Significant weight loss or weight gain
- Loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- Fatigue
- Insomnia or hyposomnia
- Difficulty in concentration or decision-making
- Feelings of guilt
- Hopelessness
- Worthlessness
- Thoughts of death or committing suicide

Self Help Tips

- Practice self care
- Start a journaling routine
- Create a sleep schedule
- Exercise regularly
- Have a daily routine
- Spend time outdoors
- Try a new hobby
- Reach out to a loved one for support
- Join a peer support group

Risk Factors

- The experience of life stressors and adverse external events
- Genetics
- Imbalance of brain chemicals
- Comorbidity of other illnesses



Reach out, Help Is Available

- Depression is highly treatable. Healthcare professionals such as clinics and general practitioners, Student Health Services and the Student Counselling Unit have healthcare professionals who are available to assist.
- You can reach out to the 24 hour UP Careline on 0800 747 747 for immediate support for depression or any other mental health conditions.

Treatment for Depression

- Psychotherapy is an important part of treatment for depression.
- Evidence has shown the efficacy of Interpersonal Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in treating depression.
- Medication such as antidepressants are also used as a medical intervention in treating depression.



Department of Student Affairs

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- For more info or self-help resources, check the Student Counselling Unit's website <https://www.up.ac.za/student-counselling>
- For 24 hr support, call the UP Careline 0800 747 747
- For academic support consult with your Faculty Student Advisor: <https://www.up.ac.za/teaching-and-learning/article/2494904/faculty-student-advisors-fsai>
- For therapy/counselling, email: studentcounselling@up.ac.za

References

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