

## Could it Be Depression?

Article printed from

<http://caregiver.depend.com/articles/caregiving/index.asp?pg=155>

### Knowing What to Watch For

Caregiving is rewarding work. It provides daily opportunities for bonding, and the ability to gain new skills and master new tasks. There's a genuine sense of accomplishment that comes with helping a loved one maintain his or her quality of life.

But caregiving is also demanding, and sometimes, depression can sneak its way into a busy caregiver's life.

According to the National Alliance of Caregiving (NAC), caregivers suffer depression at six times the national average, and women are twice as likely as men to be affected.

Recognizing the risk of developing depression is a step in the right direction. Getting the facts on the condition is another.

### Understanding depression

Everyone gets down in the dumps occasionally. It's perfectly normal to have a bad day or feel a little blue. But when that feeling becomes persistent, it's time to take serious note.

Depression is a general feeling of sadness and disinterest in everyday life and can range from mild to severe. It may be brought on by both a chemical imbalance in the brain and psychological or emotional factors. It often occurs after a major life change or loss, such as the death of a spouse.

"The fundamental problem with treating depression is that patients don't see it coming, often don't realize when they have it, and often don't have the energy or motivation to fight it," says Dr. Bob Locknow, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

### Look for the signs and symptoms

Depression exhibits several warning signs. If you or someone you know has more than four of the following indications for longer than two weeks, please seek medical help.

- Persistent sad, anxious, numb or empty mood.
- Feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, guilt.
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism.
- Crying more often than is usual.
- Restlessness, irritability, nervousness.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering things, or making decisions.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in people, hobbies, or activities that once brought enjoyment.
- Insomnia, early morning awakening, or oversleeping.
- Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling sluggish and "slowed down."

- Increased appetite with weight gain or decreased appetite with weight loss.
- Thoughts of self-injury or attempting to injure oneself.
- Thoughts of death or suicide, suicide attempts.

### **Positive steps for conquering depression**

Fortunately, depression is treatable, and like many medical issues, easier to manage when discovered early.

As with any medical condition, start with a visit to your doctor or healthcare provider. Several prescription treatments are available that help alter chemicals in the brain and boost its function. Often medications are prescribed as a temporary remedy to relieve symptoms until you're feeling better and back to your usual self again.

Treatment can also include psychiatric or psychological counseling to identify possible triggers for depression and help you cope with them better. Recent NIMH research on depression has shown that the combination of appropriate medication as well as short-term counseling therapy (usually 6-8 sessions) brings the most effective relief.

And don't forget support groups and self-help organizations. They can provide valuable help and information, as well as camaraderie with others struggling to cope with the effects of depression.

### **Taking care of you!**

Managing depression while also managing others depends on taking it one day at a time. Always take medications as prescribed and be sure your doctor monitors your progress. Making positive lifestyle changes in nutrition is also helpful, as is increasing your physical exercise.

Above all, refuse to let yourself become isolated. Welcome the support of family and friends and participate in normal activities as often as you can. With determination, positive choices, and the right steps, you will soon find yourself out of depression's shadow and feeling like yourself again.