



Rikke Hannibal

Depression is a real disease



Everyone can feel sad, discouraged, or downhearted. Common examples include when facing stressful social situations, disease, and difficult, tragic events. However, we only speak of depression if these symptoms persist for at least two weeks and prevent someone from doing the things they normally do and that bring them joy.

People suffering from depression are not losers, lazy people, or whiners. They suffer from a serious disease that prevents them from being able to face the stress of life and manage daily tasks.

Like diabetes or bronchitis, depression has particular causes, symptoms, and treatments. The earlier it is detected, the better it can be treated.

Depression can affect anyone

Depression is one of the most common diseases and also one of the most underdiagnosed. Around twenty million people suffer from depression in Europe each year. One out of every five will suffer from depression at least once during their lives. Depression can affect anyone: people at any age, in any profession, and in any social class; men, women, and also children.

Even though depression is one of the most prevalent mental illnesses, there is little awareness of it among the general public, and it is often poorly understood. Depression has no single cause and most often results from a combination of factors. This disease can develop slowly and incrementally, but it can also appear suddenly and unexpectedly.



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Depression has several faces



Wafa Lambalot

Not every person who experiences depression necessarily has the same symptoms. For some, a lack of energy and drive dominates, but for others, it is internal agitation. In general, one experiences a profound sadness and strong apathy, accompanied by a feeling of inner emptiness. People suffering from depression often have difficulty concentrating, difficulty sleeping, and various physical problems. Some may feel an oppressive anxiety.

Depression affects every area of life: daily tasks, professional obligations, leisure activities, and social interactions. The severity of depression varies and can even result in a complete inability to carry out daily tasks.

Some people only experience one depressive phase in their life, which can last for several weeks or months. Others experience many depressive phases.

Depression can be treated

Today, depression can be effectively treated with psychotherapy and/or medication. However, depression is underdiagnosed, so unfortunately these treatment methods are still rarely used. Psychotherapy teaches people strategies that enable them to manage problems in various ways. Depending on the severity of the depression, anti-depressant medication might be prescribed in addition to psychotherapy. Anti-depressants are not addictive or personality altering. Taken regularly, they reduce the symptoms of depression in most cases. Whether outpatient treatment or a stay in hospital is advised depends on the severity of the depression and the risk of suicide. In all cases, treatment for depression is prescribed by a health professional and adapted to the individual's needs.



Isabelle Hoffmann

Just listening can help



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Like other mental illnesses, depression is relatively unknown and poorly understood. In many cases, people going through depression are blamed for their suffering („he should pull himself together“). Friends and acquaintances often disengage, wrongly assuming that only doctors and psychologists have a role to play in recovery. However, as with all diseases, people suffering from depression need understanding and support from those around them.

Family and friends play an important role in recovery, equal to that of a professional. They are not substitutes for health professionals and should not give medical recommendations. But simply being present and listening can help those going through depression to feel less lonely. Talking about mental health issues and illnesses can bring important relief and is a first step to recovery.

Depression Criteria

At least five of the following symptoms, when at least one of the symptoms is either depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure:

- **Depressed mood (sad, empty, hopeless)**
- **Loss of interest or pleasure**
- **Decrease or increase in appetite**
- **Disturbed sleep**
- **Restlessness or retardation**
- **Fatigue or loss of energy**
- **Feelings of guilt or worthlessness**
- **Diminished ability to think or concentrate**
- **Thoughts of death, suicidal ideas**

The number and intensity of symptoms varies. Depression is present when these symptoms occur almost all day and persist for at least two weeks.

More information about depression and a detailed list of services and agencies that can help are accessible via the website www.prevention-depression.lu or by calling the *Service Information et Prévention de la Ligue* at 45 55 33.

Depression - Let's talk