

Depression

What is Depression?

Depression is believed to be caused by an imbalance of brain chemicals called neurotransmitters. For each person, there is a complex, individual pattern of factors that work together to either cause or prevent depression at any given time. These are external events, genetics, biochemical factors or medical diseases.

Depression is a “whole-body” illness, involving your body, mood and thoughts. It affects the way you eat and sleep, the way you feel about yourself, and the way you think about things. Depression is not the same as a temporary blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with depression cannot merely “pull themselves together” and get better. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help most people who suffer from depression.

Symptoms

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, self-pity and self reproach.
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping.
- Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions.
- Decreased energy, fatigue and listlessness.
- Restlessness, irritability, hostility, agitation
- Thoughts of death or suicide.



Treatment

Depression can be treated using appropriate medication and psychotherapy. The person will have to consult a psychiatrist for a medical evaluation and diagnosis, and will be referred to a psychologist for counselling. Someone with depression can still lead a full and rewarding life.

Facts

- Occurs in all races and ethnicities
- At least 20% SAs will experience a depressive episode at some point in their life
- Women are twice as likely to develop depression than men
- 70% of SAs who attempt suicide have a mental health disorder
- 23 known suicides in SA per day (11% of all non-natural deaths) i.e. 8 000 suicides in SA each year
- For every person who commits suicide, 10 attempt it.
- 1 in 4 teens attempt suicide