

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

Are you experiencing loneliness, anxiety, and overwhelming sadness? Do you feel as though you must fight to get through one more day almost daily? You may be experiencing what is known as clinical depression or major depressive disorder. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, major depressive disorder is the leading cause of disability in the U.S. for ages 15-44. Major depressive disorder affects approximately 14.8 million American adults, or about 6.7 percent of the U.S. population ages 18 and older in a given year. While major depressive disorder can develop at any age, the median age at onset is 32. Major depressive disorder is also more prevalent in women than in men. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-4th edition-Treatment Revised (DSM-IV-TR), a person must have five or more of the following symptoms for a period of two weeks to be diagnosed with major depressive disorder.

- Sadness, anxiety or "empty feelings" throughout the day, nearly every day
- Loss of interest in or enjoyment of your favorite activities
- Excessive or inappropriate feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Decreased energy, constant tiredness or fatigue
- Insomnia, over sleeping, or waking much earlier than usual
- Loss of appetite and weight, or overeating and weight gain
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or remembering
- Feelings of restlessness
- Chronic aches or pains that do not respond to treatment
- Tearfulness
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Obsessive rumination
- Irritability

*Bereavement must be ruled out in the case of the recent loss of a loved one.

Major depression affects so many people that it is known as the common cold of mental illness. Depression is one of the most common disorders seen in a primary physician's office. Half of all cases go undiagnosed by clinicians and suffers. Even when individuals recognize their own depression, they often will choose to remain silent and untreated. The reasons for failure to seek treatment include: stigma or fear of being ostracized, a misunderstanding of the seriousness and treatment of depression, and/or preferential attention by the individual and clinician to the individual's physical complaints. The disability caused by depression exceeds that of coronary artery disease and is greater than that caused by either respiratory disease or arthritis. Many people do not realize that they are experiencing major depression and will often tolerate this illness without treatment for weeks, months, and even years. The economic costs for this mental illness is 30 billion dollars a year. Major depression not only causes a great deal of suffering for the

individual who has it, but it is also painful for family and friends who do not understand this illness. The emotional cost to families is immeasurable as depression is the root cause of 80% of suicides. Major depression affects every area of an individual's life; and he or she can not simply "snap out of it." People suffering from major depression often experience relationship difficulties that cause marital problems and even difficulties with employment.

There are both similarities and differences in the symptoms of children and adults who suffer from clinical depression. Children and adolescents ages 15-18 resemble adults in depressed mood, inability to experience pleasure, fatigue, suicidal ideation, and concentration problems. However, there are higher rates of suicide attempts, and feelings of overwhelming emptiness and guilt among children and adolescents than among adults. This appears to be attributable to negative thoughts about physical development or puberty during childhood or adolescent years. Children and adolescents who experience depression tend to have very poor social skills. This causes them to be rejected by their peers. Consequently, rejection contributes to sinking even deeper into depression. Because self-image is so fragile during these years, it is very important that parents and other positive role models are present and active in the lives of children and adolescents. It is also imperative that parents and role models be very careful in how they interact with children, to prevent the onset of depression and/or further aggravation of it.

As with adults, depression in children is recurrent. Individuals who experience depression during their childhood or adolescent years are more likely to experience depression during their adult life. The following are ten primary risk factors for depression:

1. History of prior episodes of clinical depression especially during children or adolescent years.
2. Family history of depressive disorder, especially in first degree relatives
3. History of suicide attempts
4. Female sex
5. Age at onset before 40
6. Postpartum status
7. Co-morbid medical illness-having two diseases simultaneously.
8. Absence of social supports
9. Negative, stressful life events such as death of loved one, divorce, loss of employment, etc.
10. Active alcohol or substance abuse

Major depression is a thought and mood disorder. The most proven and effective treatment for major depression is cognitive behavior therapy. Cognitive behavior therapy is a modality that addresses and corrects the negative thought patterns responsible for causing the disorder. This model of therapy in addition to social skills training is very effective in reducing depressive symptoms in children and adolescents. Cognitive behavior therapy in combination with drug therapy is also used in the treatment of more severe cases in which a chemical imbalance is the cause of the disorder. This model of

therapy suggests that if one corrects his thoughts, he can change his emotions and behaviors. This same school of thought has scriptural bases. In fact, Proverbs chapter 27:3 states: "For as he thinks in his heart so is he." This means that our thoughts will dictate how we feel and behave. Because this is so, we must bring under subjection every negative thought that passes through our minds and cast it down immediately. God has instructed us to think on those things that are pure, holy, and of good report. It is very important that we remember these instructions in order to prevent or overcome depression.

In Psalms 143:3-10, King David provides us with the necessary steps for eliminating depression. In Verse 3, ***David identifies the nature and cause of his problem.*** He states, "For the enemy has pursued and persecuted my soul, he has crushed my life down to the ground; he has made me to dwell in dark places as those who have been long dead." ***The source of depression is our enemy, Satan, who attacks the soul (thoughts and emotions).***

Verse 4: ***He recognizes that depression steals life and light.*** King David states, "Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed and faints within me (wrapped in gloom); my heart within my bosom grows numb." ***Satan seeks to oppress our spirits by filling our minds with darkness and gloom.***

Verse 5: ***David remembers the good times.*** He says to God, "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your doings; I ponder the works of Your hand." ***Here is where David begins to correct his negative thought patterns.***

Verse 6: ***David worships and praises the Lord in the midst of his problem.*** "I spread forth my hands to You; my soul thirsts after You like a thirsty land (for water)." ***David recognizes that he needs God and that only He can quench the thirst in his soul. Satan knows that if he can rob us of hour joy, we will not give God the glory and praise and we won't be able to defeat him.***

Verse 7 & 8: ***He desperately asks God for help and waits for him to answer.*** He pleads with God saying, "Answer me speedily, O Lord, for my spirit fails; hide not Your face from me, lest I become like those who go down into the pit (the grave). Cause me to hear Your loving-kindness in the morning, for on You do I lean and in You do I trust. Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk, for I lift my inner self to You."

Verse 9: ***David prays for deliverance.*** "Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies; I flee to You to hide me."

Verse 10: ***David seeks God's wisdom, knowledge, and leadership.*** "Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; let Your good Spirit lead me into a level country and into the land of uprightness." ***Here he speaks of level country which is his emotions. He desires to be in God's will again so that he can be safe from the attack of the enemy on his soul which is the center of his mind and emotions.***

As you can see, King David did not respond to his sadness by meditating on his problem. Instead, he changed his thoughts and perceptions about his problems by focusing on the goodness of the Lord and the fact that he had already blessed him. King David *chose* to think positive which is the key to overcoming depression/sadness.

Depression is a mental illness. It is a disease that originates from both the spirit of infirmity and the spirit of oppression. When a person is oppressed, he or she is burdened down which means that he or she is in bondage. One can be healed from a mental disease as well as physical disease. Matthew chapter 10 and verse 1 (KJV) reads: "And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease. Jesus also says in Luke chapter 4 and verse 18: "...he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted (depressed), to preach deliverance to the captives....." Also, Isaiah 53:5 states, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."

If you think that you or your loved one is experiencing clinical depression, please seek the help of a licensed and qualified mental health professional. This professional can be a psychologist, psychiatrist, a licensed clinical social worker, or a mental health therapist. Please do not hesitate to seek treatment, because this disease will only worsen with time. Also, remember that the Lord will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on him, because he trusts in him. Isaiah 26:3.

May God bless you and keep you.

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