

R My Feelings

OF DEPRESSION Serious?

*And from these melancholy dispositions,
no man living is free,
no stoic,
none so wise, none so happy, none so patient,
so generous, so godly, so divine,
that can vindicate himself,
so well composed,
but more or less, some time or other he feels the smart of it.
Melancholy in this sense is the character of mortality.*

Robert Burton The Anatomy of Melancholy, 1621

Once known as melancholia, now simply referred to as chronic or clinical depression, depression has been called the common cold of the emotional disorders. While this underscores its prevalence, it trivialized its impact. Depression is a debilitating illness and is sometimes fatal (being a major contributor to suicide.)

At any one time, serious clinical depression affects **up to 7%** of Canadians bringing untold suffering. Depression occurs at all ages and is increasing among young people. Studies suggest that **25%** of all women and **16%** of all men will suffer from depression at some time in their lives. However, many practitioners feel that there is no difference in prevalence between men and women and that the difference in statistics reflects the fact that it is diagnosed more often in women.

Rates of depression have steadily climbed over the last 50 years, with the average age of onset of a first depressive episode steadily decreasing. The onset now occurs in the mid-20s where it once was mid-30s.

Is It Normal To Feel Depressed?

Living in our current society it is normal to feel depressed, at least sometimes. Most of us deny or disguise our pain because it is the smart thing to do as- who wants a depressed person around?

Feeling badly may be healthy at times as in the case of grieving the death of a loved one. But while it is normal to feel bad about some things at some times, the questions are- How bad? and For how long?

Healthy depression is allowing ourselves to feel bad for a while in response to our painful reality and understanding that our bad feelings put us more in touch with ourselves and the real world.

What Is The Difference Between The Sadness Of Grief And Depression?

During a depression the person will have distorted thoughts such as- *I can't do anything right. Nobody cares, or if I wasn't such a weak person I wouldn't feel like this.*

Normal sadness is not characterized by the distorted thoughts which are typical of depression. Normal sadness is a reaction to grief and is based on realistic perceptions of an event. A normally sad person would say, *I feel really sad because I'll miss my sister now that she moved away.* On the other hand, a depressed person may say, *I've lost my best friend. I'll never have a best friend again.* This is destructive thinking. Negative thoughts can lead to feelings of despair and loss of self-esteem.

When Is Depression Unhealthy?

Clinically depressed individuals describe themselves as feeling discouraged, hopeless and apathetic. This dejected emotional state is usually accompanied by a variety of unpleasant thoughts that often include suicidal ideation. Depressed people have a distorted view of themselves as inadequate and unworthy. They are often filled with guilt and remorse over ordinary and trivial events.

Depressed individuals hold a similarly dim view of their environment with everyday experiences and social interactions being interpreted in a critical fashion. To a depressed individual the future seems bleak and empty. In fact, some extremely depressed individuals find it impossible to imagine any future at all.

According to a Statistics Canada Survey (Canadian Community Health Survey: Mental Health and Well-Being) 4% of those surveyed reported having experienced symptoms of feelings associated with major depression & over 2/3 of those reporting these symptoms and feelings replied that they had not sought assistance.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) depression is one of the 10 leading causes of disability & WHO predicts depression will be the second leading cause of disability internationally in less than 20 years.

Diagnosing Depression

Many people do not recognize that they are depressed. They may feel down and out of sorts. To avoid these feelings, they may increase their workload or their activities. Other sufferers feel the disorder comes upon them inexplicably, like a sudden massive treachery on the part of their central nervous system. And still others experience the disorder as a familiar presence.

In diagnosing depression, four questions are considered carefully to determine whether or not an individual is suffering from an unhealthy depression.

- *How well is your body working?* Unhealthy depressions usually produce combinations of- sleep disturbances, eating disturbances, loss of sexual interest, too little or too much energy, a change of bowel habits, and non-specific aches and pains.
- *How well is your mind working?* An individual suffering from an unhealthy depression often has difficulty concentrating, remembering things, or making decisions, is confused, and sees only the negative in situations.
- *Have you lost interest in people and activities you used to like?* Unhealthy depressions turn the world grey. Nothing brings pleasure. The future looks bleak and hopeless. The depressed individual has less desire and ability to do their usual tasks at home, work, or school. They do not like themselves and being involved with others seems an unbearable burden.
- *Have you seriously thought about suicide?* Most people have had suicidal thoughts at some time in their lives. However, if you find yourself considering suicide, making plans for it, or are worried about your own self control, seek professional help immediately.

Call 1.800.SUICIDE (604.872.3311) 24/7 for immediate & confidential assistance.

**For confidential assistance
Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
www.browncrawshaw.com**