Understanding Depression

**Depression: What Is It?**
Clinical depression is not just grief or sadness, but an illness that challenges a person’s ability to perform even routine daily activities. At its worst, depression may lead a person to contemplate or commit suicide. But, here’s good news! Depression can be diagnosed and treated effectively in most people. The biggest barrier to overcoming depression is recognizing that someone is depressed and seeking appropriate treatment. There are several different types of depression (mood disorders that include depressive symptoms):

- **Major Depression**: Defined by change in mood that lasts for weeks or months. It is one of the most severe types of depression and typically involves low or irritable mood and/or a loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities. It interferes with normal functioning and often includes physical symptoms.

- **Dysthymia**: Usually continues for a longer period, often several years. There are typically periods of feeling fairly normal between episodes of low mood. Symptoms may not completely disrupt normal activities.

- **Seasonal Depression**: Also known as seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, it is sometimes called “winter blues.” It is depression that occurs only at certain periods, usually winter. Although predictable, it can be very severe.

- **Postpartum Depression**: Depression associated with giving birth and is caused by changes in hormones and can run in families. It is distinguished from “baby blues”—an extremely common reaction following delivery—both by its duration and the debilitating effects of indifference the mother has about herself and her children. An estimated 1 in 10 new mothers experience some degree of postpartum depression; women with severe premenstrual syndrome are more likely to have it. Women with postpartum depression love their children, but may be convinced they can’t be good mothers.

**Depression: What Causes It?**
There are multiple factors that cause depression. Most factors are genetic, biological or related to an environmental situation. Depression can be attributed to either one or many reasons. In some cases, depression runs in families, but individuals with certain personality traits can be more prone to depression.
Building Bridges Connections

Such traits include negative thinking, excess worry, low self-esteem, over-dependence on others, and extreme responses to stress. Depression can also accompany certain medical conditions like heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, hypothyroidism, perimenopause, Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer disease.

It’s even reported some medications can cause depression after long periods of use (e.g., birth control pills, sleeping pills, blood pressure medicine, some steroids etc). Substance (drug) abuse also leads to depression. In addition, there are biochemical causes for depression, that may occur as a result of abnormalities in the levels of certain chemicals in the brain, called neurotransmitters.

Deception: What Are Signs and Symptoms in Adults? Feeling sad or blue; Crying spells; Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities; Significant increase or decrease in appetite; Significant weight loss or gain; Insomnia or oversleeping; Agitation or irritability; Fatigue; Difficulty thinking or concentrating; Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt; Thoughts of death or suicide or suicidal attempts

Depression: How Is It Treated? Individuals are healed from depression through multiple methods including changes in lifestyle and behavior, counseling, support group therapy, complimentary therapies (e.g., massage, acupuncture, spiritual based activities, music therapy and aromatherapy, etc) and medication. A combination of these treatment approaches are often used to overcome depression.

How to Support a Friend With Depression

Educate Yourself: This includes reading materials on depression, seeking information from mental health facilities such as the Student Development Center (SDC) on the University of West Georgia’s (UWG) campus; talking with a person who has either experienced depression or supported someone with it. This makes you better equipped to talk with and help your friend or family member.

Encourage Immediate Treatment: Individuals who are depressed might not realize or even admit they are feeling this way due to embarrassment or feeling powerless to change things. The person you know may even think what’s happening is normal and is not the result of an illness. You have the ability to help him or her recognize depression and seek treatment.

You can do this by taking the next 7 steps: (1) sharing your concern with your loved one based on your observations and knowledge of depression; (2) suggest a visit to SDC if person is a UWG student, a community mental health provider, or primary care physician (3) explain that depression is a medical condition, can be treated and is sometime related to other medical conditions; (4) offer to make an initial appointment (5) help prepare a list of questions to discuss with therapist or doctor; (6) offer to accompany person to initial appointment; (7) express willingness to attend family therapy if applicable

Provide Support: You can do this by listening, letting the person know you want to understand, giving positive feedback (e.g., compliments and reminders of positive qualities etc.), encouraging compliance in treatment of depression, creating a low stress environment, offering to help with tasks and encouraging (not forcing) them to make social plans with you

Understand Suicide Risks: People who have depression are at an increased risk of committing suicide. If you believe your relative or friend is suicidal, you should do the following: (1) talk with the person directly about your concern and check to see if he/she has a plan because this indicates a higher likelihood of carrying out the act; (2) Contact an emergency resource (911, person’s therapist, suicide crisis hotline, Student Development Center (SDC) located on campus if person is UWG student, Health Services located on campus if person is UWG student; and (3) Stay with person until he/she is seen by mental health provider.

Care for Yourself: Taking care of someone with depression can be tough, and you might experience stress especially if you have others to care for besides the person with depression. It’s crucial that you seek care for yourself because you can’t help others if you are not healthy. Options for seeking self-care include joining a caregiver support group, seeking personal therapy, talking with friends, seeking medical treatment if needed and reminding yourself that depression can improve with appropriate treatment.

Face the Facts: Depression and College Students

* According to a 2004 survey by the American College Health Association, nearly 50% college students report feeling so depressed, at some point, they have trouble functioning

*15% of those students meet criteria for clinical depression
* 1 out of 4 young adults will experience a depressive episode by age 24 years

* Some stressors college students face that could lead to depression include: death of a loved one, divorce or family separation, breakup of a friendship or romance, financial or academic problems, lack of support system, trauma, assault, alcohol or drug abuse and chronic stress

* All ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups are affected by depression

* Not everyone with depression experiences every symptom

* Depression is not a personal weakness, but an illness that can be effectively treated with mental health and medical treatment

* Major depression increases the likelihood of substance abuse, impairs school and work function and influences an individual’s subsequent development as an adult in a negative way

### How to Get Help For a Friend With Depression

If your friend or loved one is a student on campus, assistance is available at the Student Development Center (SDC), UWG’s counseling center. Additional information about SDC is located to your right. Students can also seek immediate treatment, if in a crisis, at Health Services, UWG’s health center on campus. Health Services is open Monday-Thursday, 8a-6p, Friday, 8a-5p. If the above facilities are closed and your loved one or friend is a UWG student who is experiencing a crisis, contact the University Police at (678) 839-6000. If the person is not a UWG student, contact 911 if he or she is in a crisis. The National Suicide and Crisis Hotline (1-800-SUICIDE / 800-784-2433) can also provide help in a crisis.

Below, you will find additional resources that can assist you in finding help for your friend or loved one and obtaining more information on depression.

### Resources

National Depressive and Manic Depressive Association
730 North Franklin Street, Suite 501
Chicago, IL 60610

1-800-826-DMDA (3632)
Sources

Mayo Clinic Depression
http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression/MH00016

eMedicineHealth Online
http://www.emedicinehealth.com/depression/page11_em.htm

Healthy Minds.org
(American Psychiatric Association)
http://www.healthyminds.org/cmhdepression.cfm

Campus Blues
http://www.campusblues.com/depress_facts.asp