

What is Depression?

The term “depression” can be used to describe many types of emotional states. Most often it is used to describe a feeling or mood. Feeling depressed at times is a normal part of life. Depression can also be a symptom related to short term or long standing difficulties in dealing with aspects of life. A small percentage of the time, depression can be part of serious psychiatric syndromes.

What are the types of depression?

Depressions are classified in North America by the DSM system. This is a largely statistically derived and symptom based system which has attempted to provide uniformity to diagnoses for clinical and research clarity. Clinically, it is meant only as a guideline. There is no simple way of assessing an individual’s depression, nor are there any tests which can accurately categorise depressions. The

various factors associated with any depressed mood can only be determined after a thorough assessment by a qualified professional.

Any prolonged depressed mood deserves proper attention. Serious depressions are marked by a consistent lack of pleasure in any aspect of life. The degree to which depressed moods interferes with normal functioning is an important aspect in diagnosing depressions.

How are depressions best treated?

Therapy

Research has shown that mild to moderate depressions will respond to almost any reasonable treatment modality. Just sharing your feelings and concerns with family or friends can be helpful. Most people find talking to an impartial professional very valuable. In a young population, discussing distressing life issues can be crucial, both to relieving depression and to helping someone

have more positive experiences in life. Psychodynamic psychotherapy, which addresses a broad range of life issues is probably the treatment of choice for young adults. Interpersonal psychotherapy, which focuses on relationships can also be helpful. Cognitive behavior therapy, which focuses on inaccurate belief systems, has been shown to be helpful in relieving depressive symptoms, but is less helpful in promoting positive relationships and in dealing with long standing life issues.

Medication

Medication can be an important adjunct in the treatment of depression. The most severe depressions often require medication. In less severe depressions, medication may help alleviate certain symptoms and may help an individual respond better to therapy. Taking medication does not mean that one has a “chemical imbalance”. It is simply an aid, preferably along with therapy or support to help one return to normal functioning.

Understanding Depression

Resources

McGill University

Mental Health Service:

Provides confidential psychiatric assessments and treatment, and psychotherapy for all full time McGill students.

Tel: 398-6019

Counselling Service:

Personal and academic counselling is available for all full time McGill students. Various group programs are provided to respond to specific needs.

Tel: 398-3601

**McGill Mental Health Service
3600 McTavish, Suite 5500
Tel: 398-6019
McGill Counselling Service,
Suite 4100, Tel: 398-3601**



There has been a growing concern about what appears to be a rise in depressive symptoms in our society. The issues related to depression in young adults deserve special attention and expertise. Information based on studies of older adults may not apply to the university population.