



Student Services Counseling Center

Where students are assisted with academic, career and personal needs.

Greetings from the NTC Counseling Center. The counselors at NTC are available to help guide, support, and assist students with academic, personal, and career needs. Student support is our priority. Monthly, we will share information on a variety of topics. The topic for the month of December is dealing with depression. We look forward to helping you.

Depression: When the Blues Don't go Away

Everyone occasionally feels blue or sad, but these feelings usually pass within a couple of days. When a person has depression, it interferes with his or her daily life and routine, such as going to work or school, taking care of children, and relationships with family and friends. Depression causes pain for the person who has it and for those who care about him or her.

Depression can be very different in different people or in the same person over time. It is a common but serious illness. Treatment can help those with even the most severe depression get better.

Some students suffer more during holiday times, when our culture says we should all be happy and joyful. It is hard to find a place for ourselves at these times of the year when we are experiencing grief over losses of family members, pets, income, or relationships.

Other students suffer from what is called "Seasonal Affective Disorder." This is a very real condition of depression linked to a lack of sunlight or full-spectrum lighting. Residents of northern states experience this type of depression more frequently than residents of sunny weather states.

What are the symptoms of depression?

- Ongoing sad, anxious, or empty feelings
- Feelings of hopelessness, like nothing will ever change
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Feeling irritable or restless
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies that were once enjoyable, including sex, classes, or work
- Feeling tired all the time, difficulty getting out of bed for classes
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering details, or difficulty making decisions
- Not able to go to sleep or stay asleep (insomnia); may wake in the middle of the night, or sleep all the time
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Thoughts of suicide or making suicide attempts
- Ongoing aches and pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not go away

Not everyone diagnosed with depression will have all of these symptoms. The signs and symptoms may be different in men, women, younger children, and older adults.

Can a person have depression and another illness at the same time?

Often, people have other illnesses along with depression. Sometimes other illnesses come first, but other times the depression comes first. Each person and situation is different, but it is important not to ignore these illnesses and to get treatment for them and the depression. Some illnesses or disorders that may occur along with depression are these:

- Anxiety disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, social phobia, and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)
- Alcohol and other substance abuse or dependence
- Heart disease, stroke, cancer, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, and Parkinson's disease

Studies have found that treating depression can help in treating these other illnesses.

When does depression start?

Young children and teens experience depression, but it can occur at other ages also. Depression is more commonly reported in women than in men, but men do get depression too. Loss of a loved one, stress and hormonal changes, or traumatic events may trigger depression at any age. Our elderly population is also prone to depression.

Why do people get depression?

There is no single cause of depression. Depression happens because of a combination of things including the following:

GENES – some types of depression tend to run in families. Genes are the “blueprints” for who we are, and we inherit them from our parents. Scientists are looking for the specific genes that may be involved in depression.

BRAIN CHEMISTRY AND STRUCTURE – when chemicals in the brain are not at the right levels, depression can occur. These chemicals, called neurotransmitters, help cells in the brain communicate with each other. By looking at pictures of the brain, scientists can also see that the structure of the brain in people who have depression looks different than in people who do not have depression. Scientists are working to figure out why these differences occur.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS – trauma, loss of a loved one, a difficult relationship, and other stressors can trigger depression. Scientists are working to figure out why depression occurs in some people but not others with the same or similar experiences. They are also studying why some people recover quickly from depression and others do not.

Is there help?

There is help for anyone who has depression. Even in severe cases, depression is highly treatable. A very good proactive step is to visit a doctor. Your family doctor or a health clinic is a good place to start. A doctor can make sure that the symptoms of depression are not being caused by another medical condition. A doctor may refer you to a mental health professional.

The most common treatments of depression are psychotherapy and medication. An NTC counselor can help assess your situation and refer you to an appropriate therapist or physician if you desire.

Medications

Medications help balance chemicals in the brain. Although scientists are not sure exactly how these chemicals work, they do know they affect a person's mood. These different types of medications affect different chemicals in the brain. Medications affect everyone differently. Sometimes several different types have to be tried before finding the one that works. If you start taking medication, tell your doctor about side effects right away.

How can I find treatment and who pays?

Most insurance plans cover treatment for depression. Check with your own insurance company to find out what type of treatment is covered. If you don't have insurance, check with your counselor. Some clinics may offer income-based treatment costs. Medicaid plans also may pay for depression treatment.

If you are unsure where to go for help, ask your family doctor or your NTC counselor. You can also check the phone book under "mental health," "health," "social services," "hotlines," or "physicians" for phone numbers and addresses.

What if I or someone I know is in crisis?

If you are thinking about harming yourself, or know someone who is, tell someone who can help immediately.

- Call your doctor or request assistance from your NTC counselor
- Call 911, or go to a hospital emergency room to get immediate help, or ask a friend or family member to help you do these things
- Call the toll-free, 24-hour hotline of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255); TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889) to talk to a trained counselor
- Make sure you or the suicidal person is not left alone

Future informational communications from our Counseling Center will deal specifically with suicide, grieving losses, and Seasonal Affective Disorder.

(Edited from information provided by the National Institute of Mental Health)