

Answers to Commonly Asked Questions on Depression

Find answers to your mental health questions from Ramsay Health Care specialists

Understanding Depression

What is Depression?

A: *Clinical Depression is a very common disorder that occurs to quite a large minority of people in the community, and it's not an easy illness to understand for people in the community, because many people see depressed mood and depressed feeling being a normal part of human experience, and it is, but depressive illness is not. It's not a normal part of the human experience, it is a clinical condition characterised by a lot of symptoms, but more importantly it's associated with a real change in the way people feel, think and behave.*

What types of Depression exist?

A: *There are several types of Depression. We talk about Depression with melancholic features, so this is the more severe form of Depression where people are very severely affected, they often can't function at all and sometimes need to be hospitalised. There are some severe forms of Depression that are accompanied by delusions and hallucinations, so that can be very severe. But more commonly most people suffer from a less severe form of Depression, and we tend to call that non-melancholic Depression and that probably covers the vast bulk of people who suffer from Depression, so they are not well, they are not functioning as they normally would, but in a sense they are on their feet and manage to keep going somehow.*

What causes Depression?

A: *Its multi-factorial, in other words it is caused by a host of different things. One of the most important predisposing factors for Depression is genetic vulnerability, there's commonly a family history of Depression. So people who suffer from Depression will often say other people in the family who have suffered from Depression before, so there's a genetic predisposition. There's also a big input from lifestyle experiences, so people who go through very difficult early life experiences, people who have been traumatised or abused through childhood, or neglected, these people are very vulnerable to developing Depression in later life. Very often Depression will follow a major life event, negative event, such as a loss of someone close, loss of a job, anything that can impact on someone's otherwise happy life can lead to Depression in those people who are vulnerable.*

What are the early signs of Depression?

A: *The signs that people will often notice to begin with are a loss of interest, a loss of energy. So the people just aren't interested in doing the things they normally do like playing golf, or going to movies and they find their energy levels are low and they start to realise that they aren't enjoying things, in the way they usually do enjoy them. Sometimes they will start to withdraw socially, so they don't want to actually go out with people, they might avoid returning a phone call, or turn down invitations that they would normally accept. They will often start to notice some sleep changes, people start to have difficulty going to sleep or waking through the night, very classically, people might wake in the middle of the night and not be able to get back to sleep again and people are usually conscious of feeling low and gloomy, feeling a bit hopeless about the way things are going and very often start entertaining some suicidal thoughts; and that's a sign of course, that Depression is starting to become a real worry and that treatment is really necessary.*

What is the difference between generally feeling down and being diagnosed with Depression?

A: *People who have had adverse early life experiences, people who have had difficult family relationships in their early life, people who have been abused or neglected and people who tend to be highly driven people, who have high expectations of themselves, these people sometimes fall short of their expectations can lead to some vulnerability and of course people who are in unhappy life situations, people in unhappy marriages or relationships, people who are struggling with their employment and occupation, and people who have experienced significant loss, such as a loss of a partner, or family member and so on. So they are the people most likely to develop Depression.*