

GUEST COLUMN

DEPRESSION : LET THE ODD ONE OUT



Prof. Dr. U. Gauthamadas
MD PhD DPM DCBD
Neuro Behavioural Medicine Specialist
Website: www.docgautham.com



Are you Depressed or just Sad / Unhappy?

People often equate depression with being sad or unhappy. But there is a vast difference between clinical depression and sadness or unhappiness

So, how is depression differentiated from sadness or unhappiness?

Sadness is an expression of an underlying feeling of sorrow that occurs in response to some event in the person's life. It is a part of being human, a natural reaction to painful circumstances. All of us will experience sadness at some point in our lives. Sadness occurs as an immediate response to some kind of change in a person's life; typical changes include loss of a loved person, money, a coveted position, a high status, a cherished possession etc, a realization that something or someone is not as good as expected, or news of harm befalling others

Unhappiness refers to a state of mind of 'not being satisfied', 'not enjoying' or 'being annoyed'. It results from the way we perceive life. Unhappiness occurs in response to reflection on the person's situation, particularly an on-going situation.

Depression, however, is a serious illness that can cripple your family, work, or social life and, at times, can prove fatal.

In today's materialistic world, people have high and sometimes unrealistic expectations

of a large number of things including education, job, salary, marriage, relationships, material possessions, money, children etc. These expectations often result in disappointments, and thereby in sadness or unhappiness. In India, today, a proliferation in western lifestyles without the associated values, have resulted in a loss of meaning, direction, vitality, mission, purpose, identity, and genuine connection; a deep unhappiness that most of us have come to consider as simply ordinary.

Constant comparisons with others who are better off result in feelings that you're not as good as other people. You find yourself striving in vain for an impossible-to-achieve standard of living and perfection. You're frequently worried that you're not good enough, smart enough, thin enough, young enough, [whatever you want] enough. As a result you feel like your daily life is meaningless and task-driven, and that you are a victim of circumstances that are beyond your control. You're always trying to fit in and belong, but rarely feel like you do. You feel beaten down by the stress created by this perspective, and thereby unhappy or sad.

If you sit and think about the reasons behind your unhappiness or sadness, you will uncover a solid reason for it. Moreover, unhappiness and sadness are transient phenomena that may be bothersome but do not really interfere with your day to day functioning

You can distract yourself from your unhappiness or sadness by getting together with

others, or indulging in work or an activity that you love to do. And you can still indulge in pleasurable activities that lift your mood.

Depression, on the other hand, is an illness. It is a long lasting condition that results from chemical imbalance in the brain stemming from a genetic predisposition. You cannot distract yourself from depression. It is overwhelming and results in feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness that have no logical reason. It causes a consistent loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities.

When you are depressed you feel overwhelmingly sad or empty. Even if you do not appreciate it, others may observe it and point it out to you. You may feel helpless, hopeless, or pessimistic. You often feel you don't really matter and your love doesn't make a difference. You are unable to accept love and nurturing. You feel like you're not appreciated enough and are continuously disappointed with life even though others point out that there is no real reason to feel so.

When you are depressed there may be changes in your sleep pattern, with too little or too much sleep. You may feel irritable and have angry outbursts for little or no reason. You may have no urge to do what has to be done, be dull, and feel as if you have no energy. You may experience indecisiveness or diminished ability to think or concentrate, feel confused, unable to focus on work, and have difficulty in making decisions, that is not your usual way of functioning.

Contd...Pg 14

GUEST COLUMN

Contd...Pg 8

If the depression is more severe you may have recurrent thoughts of failure, inappropriate guilt, harm befalling yourself or family members, death, dying, or, in very severe cases recurrent suicidal thoughts which can culminate in suicide.

There may be changes in eating habits with either too much or too little appetite, with resultant weight gain or weight loss. You may suffer from a variety of vague, hard to treat physical symptoms, such as fatigue, chronic pain, or gastrointestinal symptoms such as hyper acidity, constipation, or frequent or loose stools.

Your depression may drive you to numb yourself with alcohol, drugs, sex, television, etc., to the exclusion of family, friends, or even work.

People often do not differentiate between unhappiness and depression. They, therefore, expect that someone with depression should be able to just get over it, or should respond to efforts to "cheer them up." They keep urging the person with depression to "take life easy", "think positively", "lift yourself out", or "distract you" - something that the person is unable to do, because the chemical changes in the brain prevent them from doing so.

The causes of depression are complicated. People are genetically or biologically predisposed to depression. Research has shown that depression is caused by imbalance of certain chemicals, called neurotransmitters in the brain. The brain is programmed, in the womb and during infancy, for depression, and the program for depression can be triggered by environmental and social factors, such as trauma and major psychological stress and major events in life such as a loss or change.

Who has what program, and when will the program for depression be triggered? Literally God only knows! Technology has not yet advanced to the point of being able to predict who will become depressed and when. You may have the program for depression but never become depressed because you have not encountered the trigger in your lifetime. Since the programming is unique to each person, two people may go through the same life events, but depression may be triggered in only one of them. Depression has a very strong genetic propagation and runs in families.

Deepika Padukone says, "In early 2014, while I was being appreciated for my work, one morning, I woke up feeling different. A day earlier, I had fainted due to exhaustion; it was all downhill from there. I felt a strange emptiness in my stomach. I thought it was stress, so I tried to distract myself by focusing on work, and surrounding myself with people, which helped for a while. But the nagging feeling didn't go away. My breath was shallow, I suffered from lack of concentration and I broke down often. Over a period of time, it got worse. When my parents visited, I would put up a brave front because they were worried about me living alone and working long hours. Then, once, while talking to my mother.., I broke down. She realized the problem, and got in touch with a psychologist friend, Anna Chandy, to get to the root of the cause. Every morning, it was a struggle to wake up, and shoot for Happy New Year's (HNY; 2014) climax. Finally, She concluded that I was suffering from anxiety and depression. When she suggested I take medication, I was resistant. I thought talking was enough. Later, I met another psychologist, in Bangalore for a second opinion. There were days when I would feel okay, but at times, within a day, there was a roller-coaster of feelings. Finally, I accepted my condition. The counseling helped, but only to an extent. Then, I took medication, and today I am much better."....
From the Hindustan Times



So, if there is history of depression in your family, take care, for what you may pass off as sadness may actually be the early sign of depression.

The most important thing to know is that depression is treatable. Regardless of the cause, there are effective treatments for depression. Depression responds quickly and easily to medicines that correct the biochemical imbalance in the brain. Contrary to popular misconception, these medicines are relative free from major side effects. The side-effects, if and when they occur, are generally less troublesome than those of other commonly used medications such as anti-hypertensive drugs and analgesics (pain killers). The benefits of medication are more important than any minor side effects.

Counseling helps if you are sad or unhappy. Depression, on the other hand, usually requires medication, but this may be augmented with psycho-therapy. Research has shown that psycho-therapy alone is less effective than medication alone, or medication augmented with psycho-therapy. Treatment is simple, and gives quick relief. Untreated depression can result in family disruption, poor work performance, fractured relationships, and even death. So, if you think someone is depressed, do not hesitate to get them to seek professional help.

☞ Depression is a serious illness that can cripple your family, work, or social life and, at times, can prove fatal.

☞ If the depression is more severe you may have recurrent thoughts of failure, inappropriate guilt, harm befalling yourself or family members, death, dying, or, in very severe cases recurrent suicidal thoughts which can culminate in suicide.

☞ Your depression may drive you to numb yourself with alcohol, drugs, sex, television, etc., to the exclusion of family, friends, or even work.

☞ Depression has a very strong genetic propagation and runs in families. So, if there is history of depression in your family, take care, for what you may pass off as sadness may actually be the early sign of depression.

☞ The most important thing to know is that depression is treatable.

