

April 1, 2020



Dear Friends in Christ,

In this time of social isolation to combat the COVID-19 virus, let's talk about depression. Social isolation can cause depression. So, let's look at clinical depression, what it is, symptoms, how it's treated, and some ways we can cope.

What is Depression?

Depression is one of the most common mental health illnesses in the United States. It affects all ages, races and sexes. Causes include genetic, biological, environmental and psychological factors. These factors can cause a chemical imbalance in the brain that is treatable. "Clinical depression" is diagnosed when an individual's symptoms are significant enough to interfere with performance of normal daily functions.

Clinical depression is not the same as feeling down or sad. Periods of feeling down or sad happen to everyone; that's normal. Clinical depression manifests itself as a persistent sadness or depressed mood lasting for more than two weeks. Symptoms include loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities, low mood, changes in appetite, sleep disturbances (too little or too much sleep), agitation, anxiety, anger, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, feeling hopeless or overwhelmed, and withdrawing from friends and family. Depressed persons may feel sad or empty and may cry often. They may also focus on physical complaints, aches, pains, and feelings of worthlessness or guilt and recurring thoughts of death. *If you are having suicidal thoughts, contact 911, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or go to the nearest emergency room.*

Diagnosis

Only a qualified medical or healthcare professional can diagnose and treat clinical depression. And here's the good news: it is treatable. First, contact your primary healthcare provider. Be honest and open, help your physician help you!

Here are some other links and phone numbers:

- [Boy's Town for adolescence and young adults](#), 800-448-3000
- [CHI Health](#), 402-717-4673;
- [Lutheran Family Services](#), 402-342-7007;
- [Methodist Health System](#), 402-354-4800;
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), Omaha Chapter, 402-345-8101;
- [Nebraska Family Helpline](#), 888-866-8660;
- [Nebraska Medicine Behavioral Health](#), 1-800-922-0000; and
- A great site for mental health education: [Depression on Medline](#).

Myths About Depression

Before I mention treatments for depression, there are a couple of other points to bring up. One is stigma. The stigma of mental illness in general and including depression can lead to feelings of shame in the affected person, their family and friends. This can lead to isolation, and further complicate treatment. Also, there are myths surrounding depression:

- One myth is depression is a character flaw or sign of a weak personality, or that the individual is weak spiritually.
- Another is that depression can be overcome by toughening it out, it will get better eventually.
- And one more is "positive thoughts" alone will make depression go away.

These myths are all false. Learn as much as you can about depression and mental illness so you can help those of us who suffer from depression. Knowledge, kindness, grace, understanding,

compassion, and action are what I believe God wants us to practice to relieve the stigma of mental illness.

Treatments and Coping with Depression

Perhaps the most important step to get relief from depression is: **Be open to receiving help.** Our Father loves you so much; He sent his very own Son to bring us eternal life. Know that, as an individual who is loved by God immensely, you have the God of creation and salvation walking with you. In 1 John 3:1a we are reminded, *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And this is what we are!”*

In 2 Corinthians 11:3-4 St. Paul proclaims, *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”* Dear fellow Christians, I know and believe this to be true!

Treatments for depression include psychotherapy, family or couple therapy, medications, and self-help strategies. Medications have helped many people by correcting the chemical imbalance in the brain mentioned earlier. Today’s medications do not make you feel sleepy or less alert.

Some self-help strategies to explore are support groups, strong social ties and a support network, good sleep habits (regular sleep/ wake times), good nutrition, regular exercise, reduced stress levels, avoiding procrastination, curbing negative thinking and regular routines to keep up with daily chores. Also, do something you are good at. Is that art? Writing? Encouragement? Baking?

To develop a strong support network, nourish and grow your relationships with family and friends. Attend church regularly and participate in activities. Developing close relationships takes time, energy, and self-sacrifice. Give of yourself and be open about your feelings.

Reducing stress is very important to our mental health and health in general. Our bodies produce a hormone called cortisol under stress. Cortisol fuels your body’s “fight or flight” instinct. Too much cortisol for long periods causes numerous other health problems. Techniques to reduce stress include daily exercise, fresh air and sunshine, journaling, listening to music or playing an instrument, playing with a pet, naps, craft projects, meditating, prayer, and calling a friend.

Maintain and grow your spiritual life. Pray, read the Bible daily, and seek the Lord. Participate church services with our church family. In this time of social isolation, that means the YouTube live stream services Mount Olive is providing, and connecting with one another through Facebook and emails.

One other great technique to reduce stress is to practice mindful breathing. With your eyes closed, relax your tummy, take a deep breath in through your nose to the count of 3, then hold the breath for 3, and release through your mouth to the count of 3. Relax and let all tension release as you softly let the breath go out our mouth. Repeat this sequence 5 to 10 times.

Remember

Learning about depression – it’s causes, symptoms and that it can be treated is a proactive step in itself. Emotional self-care could be seen by some as focusing on ourselves when we should focus on others. However, to help others, to be able to share God’s love we need to also care for ourselves first. God wants us to feed and clothe our bodies, we need to take care of our emotional selves too.

I hope this information is useful to you. Please know I write from my heart. If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact me!

Your sister in Christ,

Amie Rikke, RN
Parish Nurse/Health Ministry Coordinator

402-740-1987, ajrikke@hotmail.com