

Prescriptions for the Heart

Coping with Depression

Throughout our lives, we all experience sadness, unhappiness, or grief. These feelings may be triggered by a traumatic occurrence such as illness or the death of a loved one, and they are entirely natural and normal reactions to such losses. Some feelings associated with loss may be quite intense, especially at first, but eventually most people are able to enjoy life again.

Sometimes a sense of sadness can come without any apparent connection to any negative events. Regardless of its cause, when one's sadness won't go away, and other feelings such as guilt, not enjoying activities like you used to, or symptoms like fatigue, changes in your appetite, disruption of sleep, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, irritability, or thoughts of suicide become associated with it, it is wise to discuss your situation with your doctor.

This pattern of feelings, thoughts, and actions is commonly called "depression" or "major depression," to differentiate it from temporary or passing feelings of sadness. When depression is diagnosed in a clinical setting, such as in consultation with your doctor or a behavioral health professional, it is called "clinical" depression. Depression is a complicated condition, affecting individuals in different ways and with varying intensity. The most common denominator in depression, however, is altered biochemistry in one's brain, and this is why your doctor may suggest that a good place to start in trying to regain a sense of normalcy is through the use of antidepressant medications. Another excellent option for treating depression is psychotherapy. In psychotherapy, otherwise known as "talk therapy," you will work with a behavioral health provider to address how your thoughts and feelings are impacting your ability to live your life in a meaningful way. The best approach for treating depression is a combination of medication and psychotherapy, so your medical team may suggest one or both of these options, depending on your specific symptoms and treatment goals.

Spiritual Help for Depression

Depression not only affects your emotional and physical health, it can affect your spiritual health as well. Your relationship with God may suffer and you may think that He has forgotten about you in your time of need. At times like this it is good to remember that even some very well known biblical characters experienced depression. For example, the Psalmist David wrote, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?" (Psalm 22:1).¹ Or consider the words of Job, "...sighing comes to me instead of food; my groans pour out like water. What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil" (Job 3:24-26). Indeed, it is not hard to find in the Scriptures expressions with which we can identify when we are experiencing depression.

On the other hand, we also find hope and help in the Scriptures and in our personal relationship with God. David also wrote, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you... (Psalm 42:5-6). Sometimes when we are depressed, it is helpful to read aloud Scripture

passages like this, as a prayer and affirmation of our faith and trust that even when we are troubled within, the Lord will help us, as David also wrote: “The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped” (Psalm 28:7).

There are other sources of spiritual support, too, in times of depression. Ask your pastor and Christian friends to pray for you, and if you can find a depression support group sponsored by a local church, you may greatly benefit from participating in it. In such groups, you can usually find others who understand and will share your burden, especially as you try to learn to live with and properly manage your depression, should it become a long-term or chronic condition.

Managing Depression, Long-term

Medication(s) alone are often not enough to effectively treat depression. Although medication(s) can help relieve some of depression’s symptoms, there may still be underlying contributors that others can help you identify and resolve. This is why it is best to engage a team of allies including those already listed plus supportive family members and a good counselor or other advisors who specialize in addressing specific social or financial issues.

Be patient with yourself in all of this. Remember that as your depression developed over time, your healing may also take time – perhaps longer than you expected. Since depression affects every area of life, use every resource you can find, starting with your doctor, who may recommend helpful reading materials and other resources related to this subject.

Always remember that nothing, including depression, can separate you from the love of God, who is always near, even if it feels like He is far away. Place your trust and hope in Him, and someday you will be able to say what David said in the Psalm following the one that is quoted from earlier: “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (Psalm 43:5).

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