



OTHER BUMPS IN THE ROAD – DEPRESSION

Everyone has moments when they feel low or blue. What is the difference between one of those moments and the kind of depression that requires professional intervention? Since as many as one in five will suffer depression during their lifetime, you may want to learn more about what depression is and how to treat it.

Imagine your emotional state as a kind of seesaw. You feel great at the top, the view is fantastic, and even if it's scary you know you have a grip on things. When you drop down, the view is dramatically different, but you know that you can get back to the top. Without a partner, however, you can push yourself up only so far. If the seesaw represents your mood shifts, your brain chemicals are your partner. When your brain chemicals are functioning properly you feel fine or better. When certain chemicals drop in production (sometimes with no known cause, and other times the result of a painful event, such as a significant loss), the mood seesaw takes you down. You can still push yourself, but it takes more work. If the brain chemistry is altered significantly enough, however, then you feel abandoned on the mood seesaw, without a partner to help you reach an emotional high.

As our mood darkens, our behavior changes. We struggle to meet our professional and personal obligations, and let more and more go undone. We procrastinate, get irritable, can't concentrate, and may feel fatigued all day, no matter how much sleep we are getting. Nothing is fun anymore. We may feel worthless and guilty. We may feel nothing but a sort of numbness. We may sit and stare at the documents in front of us without really comprehending what they mean, or play computer games instead of working. We may use mood altering substances (such as alcohol, sleeping aids, or chocolate) or engage in mood altering behaviors (such as looking at pornog-

raphy, shopping, or gambling).

As your depression deepens, you may experience changes in your appetite (not hungry or always hungry) and your sleep patterns (can't fall asleep or wake up and can't go back to sleep). You may think that life is meaningless, and that "they" would be better off without you. You may decide that death is the only way out, and fantasize about some sort of accident that takes you out of your misery. Or, you may begin to actively plan your death.

THERAPY AND ANTIDEPRESSANTS

The more of these symptoms you exhibit, the more likely it is that your depression requires professional intervention. Even though depression makes any new task seem impossible, it is vital that you reach out for help as soon as possible. Studies indicate that the longer the depression lasts, and the deeper the depressive mood may be, the more likely it is that future episodes of depression will happen. Research has shown that therapy or a combination of medication and therapy works best to lift depression.

There are many options when it comes to choosing a therapist. Whereas all lawyers follow the same educational path and are licensed by the same authority in their state, therapists can choose many educational options and can be licensed by different agencies. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers are the most common types of therapists. The most important variable in choosing a therapist is whether you feel comfortable with that person and believe you can trust that person. Based on many studies, the therapeutic relationship has been found to be the key to healing, and therapy may be all you need to get better.

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