



HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Pushing Back the Darkness

Shining a light: an explanation of exactly what clinical depression is and what it isn't, and defying the stigma associated with mental illness

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WITH INFORMATION FROM MARK RICE-OXLEY

DEPRESSION IS A COMMONLY MISUNDERSTOOD word. It can mean 'sadness', or a more serious psychiatric disorder. The first definition, feeling sad, can persist and become a major mental health problem, known as clinical depression. Clinical depression can impair work performance and social relationships, as well as produce symptoms of both behavioural and cognitive nature. It is different from noticeable physical symptoms, such as the pain of a broken leg.

Clinical depression is diagnosed through known experience of changes in appetite, sleeping problems, loss of interest in work, hobbies, other people, feeling of uselessness/failure, preoccupation with these feelings, loss of energy, slowed thinking/forgetfulness, decreased sex drive, tendency to cry easily, suicidal thoughts, and sometimes, hallucinations

and delusions. Depressive disorders can vary in severity, and feeling these symptoms for more than two weeks at a time can be considered at least a minor case of depression. People sometimes struggle with depression for weeks, months, years before seeking help. Many people try to cope with their feelings on their own, which rarely ends well and can lead to stronger symptoms. This facet of depression may be seen as one of the most serious, because many people with depression don't know they have it, or otherwise don't know their options for help. They think that they can or should deal with their problems on their own, or that their problems aren't serious enough to feel the need for outside help. This is a myth that is in strong need of debunking. As humans, we need to be able to recognize the symptoms of depression, both in ourselves and in others, and educate ourselves about the channels of help that are available.

It is important to know about the different forms that depression can take, in order to better identify its presences in oneself and one's peers. Typical symptoms of depression will include loss of appetite and insomnia, while atypical symptoms include an appetite gain and increased amount of sleep. Atypical depressants feel happy when good things happen, but will quickly feel sad again when the happy things go away. Seasons may also affect a person's susceptibility to depression. Winter is often a time for depression with the lack of sunlight and warmth.

ers wanted him to be, and didn't follow his own hopes and goals. He used the illness to help him realize that many of his habits were wrong, and improved himself to become a better person than he was before.

MANY PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES DO not even know that they are mentally ill. It seems that mental illness is something of a taboo, something that we can't and shouldn't talk to anyone about. The only way to heal is to talk about

It seems that mental illness is something of a taboo, something that we can't and shouldn't talk to anyone about. This taboo needs to be eradicated. The only way to heal is to talk about it.

Mark Rice-Oxley is a middle-aged father of two from Britain. He is an excellent example of how important it is to realize that asking for help is the best thing you can do. At 40, he began to experience the typical symptoms of depression (trouble eating/sleeping) and carried a sense of unease, of being unable to settle. He tried psychiatry, but nothing consoled him except for the fact that he was not alone, many others experience depression in the same context. Mark realized that trying to be a do-it-all dad was the trigger, and he found many other men in the same situation. He was trying to do too much, to be the kind of person he assumed oth-

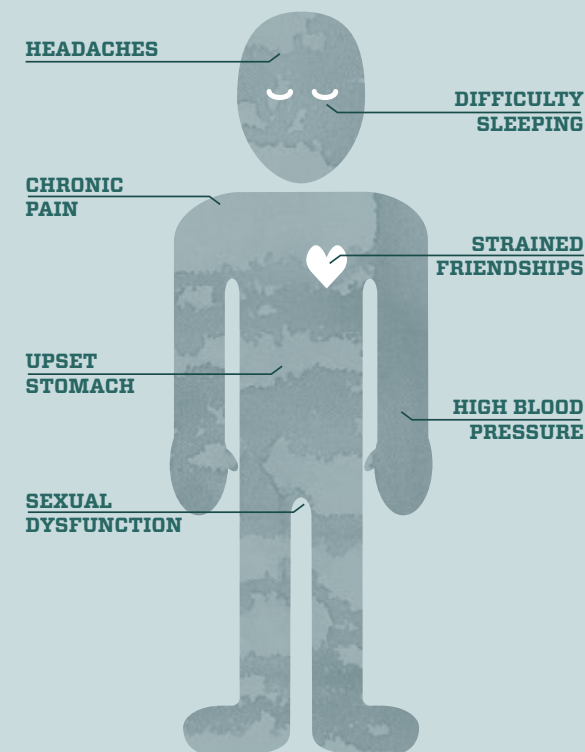
mental illness and understand the signs. Educate yourself on how to spot mental illness, both in yourself and in others.

Lol Butterfield is a mental health nurse in Britain. He would see cases of depression every day, and was used to the symptoms. But over the course of a year, when he was 51, he began to feel stressed at work and slowly became more and more depressed with each day. Shockingly, he was in denial about his condition for quite some time. He finally admitted to feeling depressed when his manager asked him for a private chat about his mood. Reflecting, Lol guessed that he had been in denial because he wanted to set a good example for his patients. His manager helped him to get a prescription for anti-depressants and some counselling. After some time, Lol weaned himself off of the medication. He still has his ups and downs, but he feels much better. Lol also carries a special empathy with his patients now, because he understands them on a whole new level.

It cannot be understated that depression is a real illness. It affects the entire body, not only the mind. One in five people in the world currently suffer from depression, and it is the leading cause of alcoholism, drug abuse, and other addictions. The good news is that it can be successfully treated in more than 80% of people who have it. Unfortunately, at least half of people suffering from depression do not obtain proper treatment. This is a scary thought, as untreated depression is the number one cause of suicide in the world. Once you recognize a case of depression, you must remember that the best thing to do is to get the help you need before it becomes something worse.

You should remember that depression is not something to be ashamed of. Recall that it happens to one in five people in the world. It is not the same as feeling 'blue' or 'down',

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION



If you experience four or more of these symptoms at once for more than two weeks, you may have clinical depression.

INFOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOUND AT
BEHANCE.NET/GALLERY/ANXIETY-INFOGRAPHIC/4138067

nor is it a character flaw or a sign of weakness. It's not a 'mood' someone can snap out of, so don't let anyone tell you that you can overcome it simply by deciding to. Mental illness comes in many forms, and it can be treated. While it may seem like an intangible thing, and cannot be seen,

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that doesn't negate the importance of finding treatment for mental illness at the first signs. Like physical illness, ignoring mental illness won't make it go away.

For decades, centuries even, mental illness has been a great secret, a bit like homosexuality in the first half of the 20th

century: something to carry around in secret, something dismal, shameful and bad. But now, finally, we're talking about it. A volley of personal memoirs has begun to spread the message: it's not your fault, it can happen to anyone.

THE BIGGEST MISUNDERSTANDING SURROUNDING depression is that we've all been a bit depressed at one time or another, so what's the fuss all about? We haven't all had depression. Depression is very different from feeling a bit down. It's not that Monday morning feeling, or returning from holiday to find the house has been burgled. It's not even the end of the affair, or the loss of a friend. It's far more all-consuming. We've all had a cold, but we haven't all had pneumonia.

Depression makes you feel alone, afraid, an outcast. Hearing that it is an illness that can affect anyone is enormously helpful. Understanding that it affects men and women, old and young also helps you to comprehend: this is universal. It can happen to anyone. You didn't pick it, it picked you. If you remember anything, it's that you are not to blame.