

DEPRESSION

The Dreaded 'D' Word

By Monica Fernandez

There was a long article on the front page of the newspapers recently. It was about the tragic and sudden suicide of a TV actress. She seemed in the pink of health physically but took her own life as she was in the throes of depression. Unfortunately suicides due to depression are on the increase. So many young lives go down the drain. These tragic cases could have been averted had these people sought timely assistance.

What is Depression?

Depression has been defined as a “state of morbidity; excessive melancholy, mood of hopelessness and feelings of inadequacy often with physical symptoms.” We all are down in the dumps sometimes, when things do not go according to our plans we are all subjects to mood changes but we surmount these low feelings and carry on with our lives. A depressed person, in contrast, only focuses on the downs of life. Depression is all pervasive and starts from the individual’s waking hours until he/she goes to sleep. The person feels tired and listless. His/her physical health is also affected.

Does Depression spread its icy tentacles equally?

People vary in their approach to life. Hitesh and Mohan both suffer from the same dreaded disease. While Hitesh takes his illness in his stride, Mohan is disturbed and depressed. Psychologists say that while some people cope with childhood criticism, others feel insecure and get depressed in later years.

Why are some less prone to Depression?

It’s largely a matter of attitude. A cheerful, optimistic person is less likely to be depressed by the vicissitudes of life. Many have an abiding faith in the Almighty. They have close pals with whom they can share their innermost thoughts. They read inspirational books and magazines. They keep themselves busy so that they have no time to dwell on sad thoughts.

Can an Individual; get out of Depression in a jiffy?

No. Depression is caused by external factors, our ability to deal with these factors and chemical imbalances in the brain. It takes time and effort to get out of the habit of wallowing in dismal thoughts. The human brain can be likened to a super efficient computer. It consists of thousands of brain cells called neurons. These neurons transmit messages through brain chemical called

neurotransmitters which, in turn, affects every facet of our lives – what we think and what we do. Depression occurs when there is an imbalance in these chemicals.

What are some of the external factors causing Depression?

A person could suffer from depression due to childhood ill treatment. He/she could have been verbally and /or physically abused. This results in a feeling of insecurity and a sense of being not wanted. Failure in exams is a major factor in these competitive times. Some students are even driven to suicide because they have not met their own or their parents' expectations. It is important at such times to have realistic expectations and to remember that failures are stepping stones to success. The loss of a job is a tremendous blow to an individual's ego and puts one in the dumps. A person who has met with a serious accident sometimes gets into depression because of a sudden change in his/her life. From being hale and hearty he/she may become temporarily or permanently disabled. Prolonged and serious illnesses are also depressing.

Having to cope with the sickness or death of a near relation or friend affects one's mental equilibrium. Being jilted by one's boyfriend or girlfriend could cause a person to be depressed. When the TV actress mentioned earlier took her own life, several psychiatrists were asked to give their opinion. They cited her possible inability to cope with a fast pace of life. Being a TV actress or actor is not a very secure profession. Audiences can be quite fickle, resulting in an actor being in the limelight one day and being dropped like a hot potato the next. One has to be mature enough to receive adulation and brick bats.

Many of the rich are stricken by the malaise of living a meaningless life. They go for endless rounds of parties and leisure holidays. They have everything money can buy but are surrounded by false friends. They have a succession of failed relationships. They lead empty lives.

Whom should we consult?

Unfortunately in our country, there is a false stigma attached to getting professional help for Depression. We spend a lot on clothes and beauty aids but tap free advice in matters relating to our mental equilibrium. This advice is readily available. Everybody thinks they are psychiatrists. Do not heed free advice when it comes to depression because it may prove costly in the long run. Consult a psychiatrist. Jayant was devastated by the sudden death of his grandmother. He was the only child of working parents and was virtually brought up by his granny in their absence. Though there were strenuous objections from family members, his father took him to a reputed psychiatrists who helped the youngster to come to terms with the tragedy.

How do psychiatrists treat their patients?

They prescribe medicines to correct the imbalance in the neurotransmitters. They help the patients to unearth suppressed feelings which are buried deep down in the subconscious and give the patient the mental tools to cope. No two patients are alike. A trained psychiatrist is an impartial observer who can gauge an individual's requirements and give the appropriate treatment.

Does a patient need any other support system?

Yes, he or she certainly does. Recovery is much faster when the person is surrounded by a loving family and good friends.