Can I treat depression on my own? [1]

Dear Alice,

I'm a first year college student. Since the holidays I started experiencing a very strong horrible feeling; so horrible I preferred to die than to keep on feeling it (the suicidal thoughts come and go still, but it's not as strong as in the beginning). It's very puzzling though because I don't have a reason to feel like this, not one that I know of at least.

I thought of going to a psychologist, or psychiatrist, but I don't have money to do so, and I thought that maybe I should try curing myself first. Is there any way to try to fight depression by myself? Also, if I don't have a reason to feel depressed, what reasons could there be for what's happening to me? I read in other things you wrote to people that depression may be also caused by chemical imbalances in the brain. How do I know if that's happening to me?

Thanks in advance,

? Puzzled and Depressed

Answer

Dear Puzzled and Depressed,

Coming forward with your suffering is commendable, and is the first step towards counteracting your depression. Depression has a variety of causes and triggers, making it hard to pinpoint the reasons you're feeling down. Now that you've identified your need for help, you can move forward in seeking changes in your life that may help lift this burden.

Depression can happen for a number of reasons ? even with professional treatment many people are not able to determine exactly why they are depressed. Fortunately, depression is treatable, even if the causes are not entirely understood. Popular theory suggests that depression is caused by a combination of genetic disposition, biochemical imbalance, as well as environmental and social factors. Some types of depression tend to run in families, suggesting a genetic link, but depression can strike even in the absence of a family history. Brain imaging of depression sufferers indicate that depression is an illness stemming from differences in brain chemistry, which may or may not be exacerbated by outside environmental and other psychological factors.

Many experience depression when triggered by trauma, loss of a loved one, a difficult relationship, or any stressful situation. In your case, there are a number of changes in your life
that may be triggering depression, including moving away from home, final exams, the dorm environment, academic pressure, and the change in seasons, to name a few possibilities.

No matter what the underlying cause of your depression is, seeking professional help is a recommended step, made even more urgent since you've been contemplating suicide. If you're a student, check to see whether there are counseling services available on your campus. Also, check out Finding low cost counseling [2]; while professional care may seem out of reach, there is likely an organization that can help you find affordable treatment. People who are in crisis or concerned about suicidal thoughts can call the free Suicide Prevention Lifeline [3] at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Wanting to pull yourself out of the depression tailspin is a brave decision. In addition to counseling and other treatments, many people find certain lifestyle changes can help manage depression symptoms:

- Engage in mild activity or exercise.
- Socialize and participate in activities. Go to a movie, a sporting event, or another event or activity that you enjoy. Participate in religious, social, or other activities.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Break up large tasks into small tasks.
- Spend time with people and confide in a trusted friend or relative. Avoid isolating yourself. Let others help you.
- Expect your mood to improve gradually, not immediately. Do not expect to suddenly "snap out of" your depression. Often during treatment for depression, sleep and appetite will begin to improve before your depressed mood lifts.
- Postpone important decisions until you feel better. Discuss decisions with others who know you well and have a more objective view of your situation.
- Pass on the alcohol and drugs. Substances that alter your mood may setback your progress in beating depression.

While these tips can help, the catch is that being depressed can make people want to do the exact opposite of these recommendations?for example, having depression can make a person want to isolate themselves, avoid activities, and/or use alcohol or drugs. Some people find they need professional care in order to garner the energy necessary to be able to engage in these self-care activities. Wherever you begin, remember that positive thinking will gradually replace negative thoughts as your depression responds to treatment and self-care. Saying affirmations and remaining conscious of your surroundings will contribute tremendously to your recovery.

Take care,

Alice!

Category:
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Published date:
Sep 03, 2009
Last reviewed on:
Jul 26, 2015

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