

# UNDERSTANDING *depression*

COUNSELING AND  
PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES  
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

215-898-7021

(including nights/weekends to reach CAPS counselor on call)

3624 MARKET STREET, FIRST FLOOR WEST  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

MON | FRI 9 am - 5 pm  
TUES | WED | THURS 9 am - 7 pm  
SAT 10 am - 3 pm

[www.vpul.upenn.edu/caps](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/caps)



ONE  
IN  
FOUR

Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 have a diagnosable mental illness and more than 10 percent of college students report being diagnosed with, or being treated for, depression or anxiety in the past year. In national surveys, college students regularly cite depression and anxiety as impeding their academic performance.

## *What is depression?*

Everyone occasionally feels down, disappointed, or upset. These normal feelings can be triggered by events, perceptions, and expectations. If prolonged, persistent sadness becomes severe and interferes with daily life, you may be experiencing "depression." Depression can involve lethargy, lack of concentration, and motivation.

## TRIGGERS OF *depression?*

COLLEGE STUDENTS CAN EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION AS A RESULT OF EXTERNAL FACTORS SUCH AS:

- Academic struggles
- Problems making or keeping friends
- Breakup of a relationship
- Homesickness
- Death of a friend or loved one

SOMETIMES, DEPRESSION SPRINGS FROM WITHIN:

- Having unreasonable expectations of yourself and others
- Lack of self-confidence or value
- Difficulty dealing with disappointment
- Being overly negative/unable to see the positives

STUDENTS MAY GET DEPRESSED FOR NO OBVIOUS REASON, WHICH COULD BE A SIGN OF A CHEMICAL OR HORMONAL IMBALANCE.

## SYSTEMS OF *depression*

### EMOTIONAL

- Feeling sad, blue, unmotivated, apathetic
- Feeling worried, pessimistic, irritable
- Lost interest in pleasurable activities
- Difficulty concentrating, deciding, remembering
- Feeling worthless or like a failure
- Feeling hopeless about the future

### BEHAVIORAL

- Withdrawing from social life or responsibilities
- Skipping class or not being able to finish work
- Neglecting personal appearance and/or hygiene
- Increasing use of alcohol or other drugs

### PHYSIOLOGICAL

- Increase or decrease in appetite
- Insomnia or inability to stay asleep
- Fatigue, loss of energy, dry mouth, constipation
- Loss of interest in sex
- Other pain resistant to medicine/treatment

## WHAT CAN I DO WHEN I'M *feeling blue?*

- Share feelings with friends, family, residential staff
- Challenge pessimistic thinking and negative beliefs
- Maintain healthy routine of class, meals, and sleep
- Stay active and exercise to release endorphins for uplifting effect on mind and body
- Help others to see that everyone has struggles
- Don't overload or overcommit
- Avoid unnecessary stress until you have more energy

## HOW CAN PSYCHOTHERAPY HELP?

Psychotherapy may be used alone or in combination with medication. Treatment can focus on past experiences affecting your present life or take other approaches depending on the source of depression.

Psychotherapy can help you grieve a loss, cope with a breakup, identify social/ interpersonal difficulties, or target negative, self-defeating thoughts.

Research suggests that psychotherapy effectively reduces depression and anxiety symptoms and positively impacts the immunity system.

## HOW CAN MEDICATION HELP?

Recent research suggests that changes in the brain chemistry, genetics, and body hormones may be linked to depression. Medications are not usually substitutes for therapy but work best in conjunction with it.

Antidepressants target some of the chemical imbalances that can alter depressive symptoms. Consult with a psychiatrist to discuss your needs and options.

## WHEN TO SEEK *professional* HELP

Three questions could help you consider whether to seek professional help.

### HOW OFTEN DO YOU FEEL DOWN?

Whenever you think about class?

On and off?

Every evening?

### HOW LONG HAVE YOU FELT THIS WAY?

Days? Weeks? Months? Years?

### HOW BAD DOES IT GET?

Are your feelings fleeting?

Do you have trouble getting through each day?

### INDICATORS THAT YOU MAY WANT TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP:

- You are struggling to deal with recurring or new depressive symptoms
- Your symptoms increased in frequency, severity, or persistence
- Friends, family, roommates or professors have shared concern about your well-being

## Penn RESOURCES

### CAPS

(including nights/weekends to reach CAPS counselor on call)

215-898-7021

### OFFICE OF THE CHAPLAIN

215-898-8456

### HELP LINE

215-898-HELP (4357)

### RAP LINE

(Reach A Peer, 9PM - 1AM)

215-573-2RAP (2727)

### SPECIAL SERVICES

215-898-6600

### STUDENT HEALTH SERVICE

215-746-3535

### OFFICE OF THE VICE PROVOST FOR UNIVERSITY LIFE/ STUDENT INTERVENTION SERVICES

215-898-6081

### WEINGARTEN LEARNING RESOURCES CENTER

215-573-9235

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*You may be experiencing depression if several of these symptoms are interfering with your ability to function and enjoy life for a period of time – typically two weeks or more.*