

Karen was starting the spring semester at the new university she transferred to. She did it to be with her boyfriend, well, ex-boyfriend, seeing as they broke up over winter break. Karen was walking on the quad towards class, and the cold, gray January day matched the feeling inside her. Over the past few weeks she has been barely able to eat, has had erratic sleeping patterns, and feels completely hopeless. As the days go on, the thought that “if I have to live like this, I’d rather not be alive,” enters her brain more and more as she endures clinical depression.

-----Clinical Depression-----

What Is It?

Clinical depression is a medical disorder that causes severe changes in mood, sleep, and thinking. Everyone feels down at some point in his or her life, and some feel it more often than others do. However, clinical depression is NOT a feeling that passes with time. It is a condition that persists and cannot simply be “willed away.”

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Depression?

- Feeling sad, anxious, or “empty” inside
- An overall decrease in energy
- Loss of interest in activities you like
- Sleep disruptions (this can include insomnia, waking up earlier than usual, or oversleeping)
- Appetite/weight changes
- Thoughts of death/suicide
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability or shortness of temper
- Becoming emotional or upset for no particular reason
- Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt

Clinical depression can manifest itself in three different forms:

1. **Major depression:** when you experience five or more of the aforementioned symptoms and your daily functioning is impaired for more than two weeks

2. **Dysthymia**: when you experience at least two of these symptoms over a period of two years. The symptoms may seem less severe, but they still get in the way of allowing you to perform to your full potential and they keep you from feeling well overall.

NOTE: People with bipolar disorder experience major depression when they have an episode of depression due to their disorder.

What Causes Depression?

A few risk factors:

- Family history: If a member of your immediate family has had depression, you may be more likely to develop it as well.
- Stress: psychological and environmental factors can contribute to a depressive episode. Some likely college stressors are: greater academic demands, being on your own in a new environment, changes in social or family relations, financial responsibilities, and a firmer understanding of your sexual identity/orientation
- Age: the most common age for depression is between 15 and 24
- Gender: females are twice as likely to develop depression
- Marital status: single individuals are more likely to become depressed

****The causes of depression are often complex and cannot be attributed to just one event or stressor.****

How can I beat depression?

- Once you have recognized the signs/symptoms of depression in your own behavior, you can move on to treating the disorder.
- The first step in receiving treatment is talking to a health professional. There are services on campus for those with mental illnesses and professionals that can help you overcome depression. If you don't feel comfortable approaching a professional by yourself, bring along a friend for support.
- Treatment usually consists of psychotherapy, antidepressant medication, or a combination of both. You and your health counselor can try different variations of treatment to figure out what fits you best.
- Keep your healthcare professional consistently updated on how you are feeling. It often takes a while to find the best type of treatment, and oftentimes medicines must be adjusted as time goes on.

Warning: Regular or heavy alcohol use can worsen most psychological states, such as anxiety, depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, or eating problems. Alcohol can change the way a person feels in the short run; however, the overall effect only worsens a disorder. Marijuana and other drugs can have similar or more serious effects on the brain.

Where Do I Go for Help?

- The University Student Health Center: every college or university has a student health center where you can go if you're not feeling well. Although these places may not have mental health counselors, they can certainly help you find a place to go or refer you to a mental health professional who can speak with you.
- Community Mental Health Agency: if your university or college does not have its own mental health department, you can likely find one available to the general public.

****There are usually several resources available at low cost or no cost to college students****

A Note About Suicide

If you have thoughts about suicide or death, it is important that you seek help immediately. Thoughts such as these or attempts at suicide are usually signs of severe depression. If you are contemplating committing suicide, talk to someone who you trust and who you think will be understanding and helpful. This may be a friend, an advisor, a parent, a sibling, a professor, a coach, or a counselor at a student health center. If you feel that you would rather remain anonymous, an excellent resource is a suicide hotline:

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org;
English 1-800-273-TALK; Spanish 1-800-628-9454
NAMI-www.nami.org or NAMI-HelpLine 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
Depression and Bipolar Alliance- www.dbsalliance.org
National Institute of Mental Health www.nimh.nih.gov
Screening for Mental Health www.mentalhealth.org
American College Counseling Association www.collegecounseling.org
National Panhellenic Conference www.npcwomen.org
National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide (NOPCAS) www.nopcas.org
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association www.naapimha.org
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention www.afsp.org

Seek help—in the long run, you'll be glad you did!

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