

## Depression

Depression is a vast and complicated disorder that is quite misunderstood among many people. Clients may enter my office reporting such problems as lack of concentration, loss of energy, weight change, insomnia, irritability and disinterest in things that had previously given them pleasure. When I suggest depression, some clients disagree and respond, "I don't lie around in bed all day." I find this to be the common misperception of depression. Because we are all individuals, depression can manifest itself slightly differently among people. Besides the previously mentioned symptoms, other symptoms may include feeling of sadness or emptiness, moodiness, lack of interest in their work, excessive guilt and/or anger. Many times the depressed person fails to recognize these symptoms, yet others do recognize them in the depressed person, especially loved ones.

The winter months can be a difficult time of year for many people. Now that the holidays are over, we are faced with three months of cold and darkness. Restrictions to indoor activities and limited day light can lead to low energy levels, especially in adults. Many studies have shown that people who are normally energetic and happy can become sad around this time of year. Therapists sometimes refer to this sadness as seasonal affective disorder, or SAD. SAD is easily treated through talk therapy, and sometimes light therapy. Simply increasing the brightness of home and work environments this time of year has been shown to improve moods.

Major depression is what many people envision when they think of depression. Major depression disorder is severe and needs immediate medical attention. Major depression can have all the previously listed symptoms with the addition of inability to function due to feelings of worthlessness, lack of hope for their future and many times thoughts of death. Severely depressed people may have felt depressed most of their lives, or they may have "waves" of periodic depression that stops them from functioning normally. These people have many options including talk and behavior therapy, family therapy, anti-depressants and hospitalization.

Most depression I see these days is mild to moderate, and can be treated effectively. Through talk therapy, clients typically describe their symptoms and I help then organize their thoughts draw conclusions and generate options. Behavior is a big part of therapy, typically their behavior makes it difficult for the client to rise above their depression, so new behaviors are explored. Many times the new behaviors involve increased socializing with supportive family and friends. This may include re-igniting old friendships, joining a club, exercising, volunteering or taking a class. Because depression is un-motivating, simply beginning therapy can be a difficult task. Although the work has just begun, typically clients report some relief and a sense of accomplishment after the first session of therapy.