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COMCARE Article

ISSUES & articles

about Mental Health in Sedgwick County Government

December 2013

College Students' Frequently Asked Questions About Depression

Many young adults experience the first symptoms of depression during their college years. Unfortunately, many college students who have depression aren't getting the help they need. They may not know where to go for help, or they may believe that treatment won't help. Others don't get help because they think their symptoms are just part of the typical stress of college, being away from home for the first time, or they worry about being judged if they seek mental health care.

Most colleges offer free or low-cost mental health services to students. Depression is a medical illness and treatments can be very effective. Early diagnosis and treatment of depression can relieve depression symptoms, prevent depression from returning, and help students succeed in college and after graduation.

Q. What is depression?

A. Depression is a common but serious mental illness typically marked by sad or anxious feelings. Most college students occasionally feel sad or anxious, but these emotions usually pass quickly—within a couple of days. Untreated depression lasts for a long time, interferes with day-to-day activities, and is much more than just being "a little down" or "feeling blue."

Q. How does depression affect college students?

A. In 2011, the American College Health Association–National College Health Assessment (ACHA–NCHA—a nationwide survey of college students at two- and four-year institutions) found that about 30 percent of college students reported feeling "so depressed that it was difficult to function" at some time in the past year.

Depression can affect academic performance, sleep, ability to concentrate and can result in social isolation. Studies also suggest that college students who have depression are more likely to smoke. Research suggests that students with depression do not necessarily drink alcohol more heavily than other college students, but students with depression, especially women, are more likely to drink to get drunk and experience problems related to alcohol abuse, such as engaging in unsafe sex. Depression and other mental disorders often co-occur with substance abuse, which can complicate treatment.

Perhaps most importantly, depression is also a major risk factor for suicide. Better diagnosis and treatment of depression can help reduce suicide rates among college students. In the fall of 2011, more than six percent of college students reported seriously considering suicide, and about one percent reported attempting suicide in the previous year according to the ACHA–NCHA survey. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for teens and young adults ages 15 to 24. Students should also be aware that the warning signs can be different for men and women.

Q. Are there different types of depression?

A. Yes. The most common depressive disorders are:

- Major depressive disorder—also called major depression. The symptoms of major depression are disabling and interfere with everyday activities such as studying, eating, and sleeping. A person with this disorder may have only one episode of major depression in his or her lifetime. But more often, depression comes back repeatedly.



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- Dysthymic disorder—also called dysthymia. Dysthymia is mild, chronic depression. The symptoms of dysthymia last for a long time—two years or more. Dysthymia is less severe than major depression, but it can still interfere with everyday activities. A person with dysthymia may also experience one or more episodes of major depression during his or her lifetime.
- Seasonal affective disorder—depression that begins during the winter months and lifts during spring and summer.
- Bipolar disorder, also called manic-depressive illness, is not as common as major depression or dysthymia but often develops in a person's late teens or early adult years. At least half of all symptoms start before age 25. People with bipolar disorder may show symptoms of depression and are more likely to seek help when they are depressed than when experiencing mania or hypomania. Bipolar disorder requires different treatment than major depression, so a careful and complete medical exam is needed to assure a person receives the right diagnosis.

Q. What are the signs and symptoms of depression?

A. If you identify with several of the following signs and symptoms, and they just won't go away, you may be suffering from depression:

- Trouble sleeping or inability to sleep
- Difficulty concentrating, things just seem harder than usual
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Pervasive negative thoughts
- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Feeling irritable, short-tempered or more aggressive than usual
- Increase in alcohol consumption
- Thoughts that life is not worth living (*seek help immediately*)

Q. What causes depression?

A. Depression does not have a single cause. Several factors can lead to depression. Some people carry genes that increase their risk of depression. But not all people with depression have these genes, and not all people with these genes have depression. Environment—your surroundings and life experiences, such as stress—also affects your risk for depression. Stresses of college may include:

- Living away from family for the first time
- Missing family or friends
- Feeling alone or isolated
- Experiencing conflict in relationships
- Facing new and sometimes difficult school work
- Worrying about finances.

Q. How can I find out if I have depression?

A. The first step is to talk with a doctor or mental health care provider. This could be your family doctor, campus health center staff, community mental health center clinician or other trusted adult.



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It can take courage to admit that you need help. With an appropriate diagnosis and treatment, most people recover. The darkness disappears, hope for the future returns, and energy and interest in life can become stronger than ever. If you are uncertain about who to call for help you can make a confidential call to **COMCARE of Sedgwick County** and talk with a professional about how you are feeling. COMCARE of Sedgwick County is a licensed Community Health Center for residents living in Sedgwick County.

Crisis Intervention Services

24 hour Mental Health Emergency /Suicide Prevention Services

934 N. Water 660-7500

TTY 800-766-3777

Fax 660-1897

Adult Mental Health Same Day Assessment

Walk-Ins Welcome, No Appointment Necessary

Monday – Friday 8:00am – 3:30pm

934 N. Water 660-7540

TTY 800-766-3777

Fax 660-1897

Adult Addiction Treatment

Walk-Ins Welcome, No Appointment Necessary

Monday – Friday 8:00am – 3:30pm

940 N. Waco 660-7550

Fax 383-8241

National Institute of Mental Health