Coping with Depression

Everyone has times when they feel down or blue for a period of time. It is normal to feel sad when a relationship ends, a good friend moves away, you move away from family or someone you care about dies. The stress of a heavy course load, financial difficulties or relationship problems can also have a negative impact on our mood. However, in these situations, the sad feelings usually pass and we still experience enjoyment when we spend time with friends or family.

However, sometimes these sad feelings don’t go away and we stop enjoying activities and begin to withdraw from friends and family. We might have difficulty attending work or class, keeping up with coursework, or even get out of bed in the morning. These may all be signs of depression.

What is Depression?

Depression is a prolonged and persistent down or sad mood which interferes with different areas of our life, such as work, school, our relationships, and our ability to take care of ourselves. It is characterized by feelings of worthlessness, excessive guilt, loneliness, sadness, hopelessness, and self-doubt. Thoughts of suicide may also be present.

According to National Institute of Mental Health, approximately 6.7% of the US population age 18 and older is affected by depression. Nearly half of all college students reported that they have felt so depressed that they found it difficult to function during the last school year.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

You or someone you know may be depressed if experiencing most of the below symptoms for more than two weeks:

- Mood is depressed for most of the day, almost everyday
- Unable to enjoy activities you have enjoyed in the past
- Insomnia, early morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- Appetite changes (increase or decrease)
- Low energy or fatigue
- Recurring thoughts of death / suicide
- Feelings of guilt, hopelessness, or worthlessness
- Crying spells, sadness, and/or irritability
- Indecisiveness, poor concentration or diminished attention span
- Loss of motivation

It is not uncommon for people who are depressed to think about suicide. It is important to seek help immediately if you or someone you know is having these thoughts.

Getting Treatment for Depression

If you feel that you may suffer from depression it is important for you to remember that good help and effective treatment is available. Counseling services are available to all students, free of charge, through the Student Affairs office. In addition, the University Counselor can help identify mental health resources in the community for both students and employees.
Some Additional Strategies That You Can Use To Deal with Depression
In addition to seeking professional help, the following strategies can be useful in overcoming symptoms of depression:

- **Be aware of your stress levels.** Now is not the time to be taking on new projects and responsibilities. Consider paring down what you're doing to make your schedule more manageable.

- **Take care of your body.** Try to eat nutritious meals, get exercise, and get enough sleep (7-8 hours a night).

- **Take life one day at a time.** Don’t get consumed with thoughts of the future: make small goals that can be accomplished each day.

- **Express your feelings.** Find a way to experience feelings that is comfortable for you – talk to someone (friend, family member, counselor, religious leader, professor, etc.), write in a journal, go to a support group.

- **Build pleasure and fun into each day.** Treat yourself to something that you will enjoy and that will require you to expend some energy.

- **Challenge any negative self-talk or messages that you may be giving yourself.** Look for the truth in any messages that you give yourself. Stick with what you know is true, is real, and is observable, rather that jumping to conclusions or making assumptions. Do not focus on the negative.

- **Surround yourself with supportive people.** Identify the positive people in your life—good friends, family a counselor - anyone who will be supportive, encouraging and uplifting.

- **Give yourself time to feel better.** Change doesn't really happen overnight. There will be highs and lows, but allow yourself the time you need.

If you find you are struggling with depression and need help developing ways to cope, individual counseling services are available to all students, free of charge, with Becky Lawyer, MA, LPC, the University Counselor. Call (952) 885-5405 for an appointment.