Depression
An Emotional Flu ......

Depression is compared to the “flu in mental health” in that it is a common mood disorder. Researches suggested that, among 100 persons, 16 to 21 of them may have depression at least once in their lifetime. Similar to other physical illnesses, depression is a treatable condition with proper medical care and psychological counseling.
Depressive Mood vs Depression as a Disorder?

We all feel depressed at times, especially when we face stressors. However, when people feel depressed most of the time for two weeks or more and if they also show the following symptoms or signs while these represent a marked change, they may be suffering from depression.

**Emotional Symptoms:**
- Feeling sad, depressed or lowish
- Loss of interests or enjoyment
- Feeling guilty, helpless and/or hopeless
- Feeling nervous, irritable or anxious

**Physical Symptoms:**
- Feeling tired; having low energy level
- Sleep disturbance
- Decrease or increase in appetite
- Unusual weight loss or weight gain
- Decrease in sexual urge

**Cognitive Symptoms:**
- Concentrate difficulty
- Difficult to make decision
- Deteriorated memory
- Excessive self-blame
- Thinking about death or suicide; attempting suicide

**Behavioral Symptoms:**
- Becoming withdrawn socially; avoiding social interactions
- Becoming slow in movements
- Losing interest in maintaining personal hygiene or grooming
- Decrease in the abilities to function in their academic, occupational, interpersonal or other major life domains

**Personal Story**

“It was really hard to get out of bed in the morning. I just wanted to hide under the covers and not talk to anyone. I didn’t feel much like eating and I lost a lot of weight. Nothing seemed fun anymore. I was tired all the time, and I wasn’t sleeping well at night. But I knew I had to keep going because I’ve got my study and my parents. It just felt so impossible, like nothing was going to change or get better.”
Risk Factors of Depression

**Biological Factors:**
- Heredity
- Hormonal imbalance
- Imbalance in brain chemicals
- Influence of alcohol or other substances
- Other medical conditions

**Personality Factors:**
- Tend to be sentimental
- Prone to anxiety
- Having high demands on self and/or others; perfectionistic
- Being stubborn or rigid

**Environmental Factors:**
- Exposure to high level of stress or a prolonged period of stress
- Stressful events in life
- Failures
- Relationship break-up
- Financial difficulties
- Chronic illness
- Death of loved ones
Warning Signs of Suicide

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling helpless and trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about feeling worthless and being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

Seeking help is a sign of strength. If you are concerned, go with your instincts!

**Suicide Prevention Hotline (24 Hours)**

GET HELP!

The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong: 2389 2222
The Samaritans Hong Kong (Multi-lingual): 2896 0000
Suicide Prevention Services: 2382 0000
Caritas Family Crisis Support Hotline: 18288

Treatment

When you have concerns that you may have depression, it is very important to seek professional help as soon as possible for further assessment and treatment. You can consult doctors, clinical psychologists or Student Counselors.

Medication

Anti-depressants are prescribed to adjust the imbalance in brain chemicals. It is important to take the medications as instructed by the doctors for stable effects. Please do not reduce the dosage or stop taking the medications on your own. In case of side effects, please communicate with your doctors. Please also inform your doctor if you use alcohol or other substances.
Psychological Counseling

Clinical psychologists and Student Counselors can provide counseling to help people with depression to better understand their situation and the thinking patterns that contribute to the onset of depression. Through counseling, people can learn to develop more skills to adopt objective and positive thinking styles, to develop more skills in managing their stress and solving their problems.

How can I help a loved one who is depressed?

- If you know someone who is depressed, it affects you too. The most important thing you can do is to help your friend or relative get a diagnosis and treatment. You may need to make an appointment and go with him or her to see the doctor. Encourage your loved one to stay in treatment, or to seek different treatment if no improvement occurs after 6 to 8 weeks.
- Offer emotional support, understanding, patience, and encouragement.
- Talk to him or her, and listen carefully.
- Never dismiss feelings, but point out realities and offer hope.
- Never ignore comments about suicide, and report them to your loved one's counselor or doctor.
- Invite your loved one out for walks, outings and other activities. Keep trying if he or she declines, but don't push him or her to take on too much too soon.
- Provide assistance in getting to the doctor's appointments.
- Remind your loved one that with time and treatment, the depression will lift.

How can I help myself if I am depressed?

- If you have depression, you may feel exhausted, helpless, and hopeless. It may be extremely difficult to take any action to help yourself. But as you begin to recognize your depression and begin treatment, you will start to feel better.
- Do not wait too long to get evaluated or treated. There is research showing the longer one waits, the greater the impairment can be down the road. Try to see a professional as soon as possible. Try to be active and exercise. Go to a movie, a ballgame, or another event or activity that you once enjoyed.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Break up large tasks into small ones, set some priorities and do what you can as you can. Try to spend time with other people and confide in a trusted friend or relative. Try not to isolate yourself, and let others help you.
- Expect your mood to improve gradually, not immediately. Do not expect to suddenly "snap out of" your depression. Often during treatment for depression, sleep and appetite will begin to improve before your depressed mood lifts.
- Postpone important decisions, such as quitting school, making commitment or changing jobs, until you feel better. Discuss decisions with others who know you well and have a more objective view of your situation. Remember that positive thinking will replace negative thoughts as your depression responds to treatment.
- Continue to educate yourself about depression.
Prevention

• Becoming more aware of your feelings and stress level
• Taking action to manage your stress
• Having sufficient rest and relaxation, and regular exercise
• Sharing with your family and friends and seek their support when facing problems or feeling stressful
• Having realistic expectations on yourself and others
• Adopting an objective and positive perspective when facing challenges and problems
• Seeking professional help (e.g., Student Counselors, doctors, clinical psychologists) when necessary

Professional Help-seeking

The University provides professional counseling services for undergraduate and postgraduate students. You may check out the profiles of our Student Counselors on our webpage and make an appointment with them online. Three weeks’ advance booking is allowed. Please be reassured that all sharing and discussion during counseling sessions will be strictly confidential.

Acknowledgment: Reference from
1. The National Institute of Mental Health
2. Lépine, Jean-Pierre & Brilley, Mike, (2011), The Increasing Burden of Depression, Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment, 7(11), 3-7

Counseling and Wellness Center
http://counsel.ust.hk Room 5003 (via lift 3)
Email: counsel@ust.hk Tel: (852) 2358 6696

24/7 HEARing: (852) 8208 2688
This is a 24-hour helpline that supports exclusively all HKUST students 7 days a week. The service is made available by our Counselors in collaboration with the Christian Family Service Center.