

## **Depression - Overcoming it**

### **Make your own recovery the first priority in your life. - Robin Norwood**

When his father had a sudden heart attack and died, Jack Lawson was devastated. He withdrew from friends and family, couldn't sleep at night, and cried frequently. Jack Lawson was depressed and it took him a good six months before he recovered, but afterwards he felt "better put-together than before."

Like Jack, we all grapple with depression at some point in our lives. For most of us we emerge from a period of depression feeling the way Jack felt, "better put-together than before." Nevertheless we struggle through periods that seem endless and hopeless. Often a stretch of depression is triggered by the bodies normal reaction to stressful and tragic situations like losing a job, experiencing a divorce, losing a loved one and so on. Because none of us are immune to life's ups and downs, it's almost natural for us to stumble and experience periods of despair. Many of us find ways to fight our way through the tumultuous times and surface victorious.

Like many ailments, depression becomes more and more destructive as it progresses over time. That's why for those who don't fight through the tough times depression reaches depths unimaginable. In fact, it has the power to skew our perception of reality. The language of our minds is no longer in our control, but given over to something so powerful and damaging that it can destroy us. Our sometimes- negative thoughts turn into always- negative thoughts. We begin to feel that no one loves us and before we know it, we don't even love ourselves. In fact, we hate ourselves. And when this occurs, we're really desperate.

The symptoms can be very painful and multifaceted. Some such symptoms include a loss of self-esteem, appetite or libido. It can induce indecisiveness, alcoholism, sleeplessness, irritability, bad temper, tearfulness, dejection, procrastination, apathy, headaches, backaches, chronic fatigue, nausea, digestive upset, and many other ills. Wow, that's a lot of negative stuff. And while all these things are devastating in their own way depression, when not treated, can kill.

Since depression is so complex, can we truly overcome it? Dr. Frederick Flach, professor of psychiatry at Cornell University explains "the causes range from physical, emotional, or spiritual and can be very complex. There are no simple answers, but once we understand and treat the causes, we can overcome the monster we know as depression." And a monster it is. Anyone suffering from depression can tell you it's like a living hell. What is encouraging, however, is that, yes, it can be treated and defeated.

### **Physical causes**

For several years fatigue and depression plagued Joan. A thorough medical examination showed that she had low blood sugar (hypoglycemia). After a short time on a suitable diet she was back to her usual, bright self.

Physical exhaustion, burnout, an unbalanced diet, too much refined sugar, lack of exercise, a chemical deficiency in the brain, or hormonal changes can make people vulnerable to depression too. The latter is especially true for women during their menstrual cycle or pregnancy, immediately following the birth of a child, or during menopause.

A thorough medical examination can diagnose physical causes of depression. A balanced diet, proper nutrition and hormone balance, adequate rest, regular vigorous exercises are all crucial

to overcoming depression. In some cases where there is a chemical deficiency in the brain, a doctor may see the need to prescribe anti-depressant drugs.

### **Emotional causes**

Some depression is the result of normal mood swings that most healthy people experience at some time. Other kinds of depression may be rooted in painful childhood experiences such as physical or sexual abuse, neglect, or from a feeling of not being fully loved. Lack of purpose, not using one's abilities, loneliness, unmet needs, and unfulfilled dreams, can all cause or increase depression.

Long-term depression may be caused by repressed feelings, especially negative ones such as anger. Dr. Theodore Isaac Rubin, eminent psychiatrist and author of *The Angry Book*, reminds us that when we deny our true feelings - smile when we feel like snarling - the suppressed anger can lead to anxiety, depression, insomnia, psychosomatic illness, alcoholism, frigidity, impotence, and downright misery.

Anger turned in on ourselves can spiral into depression. So can a number of other negative emotions. We can be on a mountaintop and immediately fall off a cliff. This is actually a frequent phenomena where despair, discouragement, and disappoint find their home. We might receive ten accolades, but we remember the one criticism. That one negative or snide remark sticks to our hearts like duck tape. And that is the seed of depression. We lose sight of the fact that we control our own thoughts. This is probably the only thing we do control but when we are depressed, we no longer even have control over what we think.

It helps tremendously to talk to a friend, family member, pastor, or counselor. But for those who don't see any way out, depression overrides reality. It's powerful stuff.

Happiness lurks somewhere inside you. Reach out to the world with a smile, a kind gesture, a compliment. The reaction you get might surprise you. Your gestures mean as much to me as mine do to you. Let's get through this together.

### **Spiritual causes**

Man is much more than a physical and emotional being with a need of food, rest, exercise, and loving relationships. He is also a spiritual being. Many of us feel unsatisfied and our search for satisfaction has left us empty-handed. Yet we are grasping for something, something we just can't get our hands on, something at arm's length. What is it?

Our spiritual needs often go unmet because we don't even know what those needs are. If outwardly your life seems fine, but inwardly your empty and lost, you might be searching for something that no object, friend, or mate can replace. And the search for that need often leads to depression. We are all prone to bouts of depression and seek more than a Band-Aid recovery. The thing to remember is you're not alone. You never are.

Searching for meaning can be a daunting task, so can feeling lousy and living without any hope. In your search for meaning there is light at the end of that ominous tunnel. The Psalms are one of the best places to go for encouragement and to satiate that spiritual need. Psalm 139: 1-4 tells us that we are never alone neither in our actions or our thoughts.