

Depression is alive and thriving in the African-American community and we need to talk about it. Let's stop the silence. Mental well-being is fundamental to our health and overall quality of life.

"Black people in America have survived by relying on each others' know how and strength since we were brought here involuntarily. Our ability to overcome the epidemic of depression in our community requires a similar reliance on each other and a sharing of resources. We need to pool our communities' common-sense responses, our spiritual resilience, and our scientific knowledge."

Robert L. Atwell, Psy.D. - Clinical Psychologist
National President
Association of Black Psychologists

The causes of depression are unknown however; there is evidence that it can be triggered by biological and genetic factors and other ways such as:

- Certain medications
- Cognitive issues (e.g., negative thinking patterns)
- Gender (it affects more women than men)
- Social and economic stress
- Racism and other forms of discrimination
- Physical and mental abuse

African Americans and Depression – Myths & Stigma

Many African Americans rely upon myths to deal with depression and often fall victim to stigmas that prevent them from seeking treatment for depression. There is a tendency among African Americans to minimize the significance of stress and to prevail in the face of adversity through increased striving. In general, African Americans tend to deny the threat of mental illness and strive to overcome mental health problems through self-reliance and determination.

"If our people made it through slavery, we can make it through anything."

"When a Black person suffers from a mental disorder, the opinion is that he or she is weak. And weakness in Black people is intolerable."

"Many African Americans do not get treatment, often because of a widespread belief in the African-American community that depression is evidence of personal weakness, not a legitimate health problem."

"Depression, or any other form of mental illness, is generally considered to be a sign of weakness, and no one will admit having that condition. The preference is to try and "wait it out," or to seek relief through tobacco, drugs, or alcohol, rather than involve others in your personal business."

"People who suspect they might have a mental problem don't want it to be confirmed by outside experts."



Gloria Boseman,
PhD, RN
Professor of Nursing –
New Jersey City University

"... many African-American women do not get treatment, often because of a widespread belief in the African-American community that depression is evidence of personal weakness, not a legitimate health problem. It's time for the masks to be removed. In order for healing to begin, we must honestly face ourselves."

Mind, Body & Spirit

"You should take your troubles to Jesus, not some stranger/psychiatrist." Culturally rooted traditions of religious beliefs and practices carry important consequences for the willingness to seek mental health services.

Seeking help for mental illness is a sign of *strength* and *not a weakness*. People with depression do not just "snap out of it." Spiritual guidance along with treatment by a mental health professional can be very beneficial to recovery.

An increased number of religious leaders are taking a more holistic or total approach to assisting parishioners through their mental health challenges.

Symptoms of Depression

- Loss of interest in activities that used to be enjoyable
- Dissatisfaction with life/irritability
- Decreased desire to participate in social activities
- Lack of pep, energy and motivation
- Feeling useless/hopeless

How Depression Impacts the Mind

- Feeling sad, blue or hopeless most of the day
- Inability to *think* of anything that would be enjoyable
- Feelings of excessive guilt, or feelings of worthlessness
- Poor concentration and memory
- Loss of self confidence
- Thoughts of dying and suicide

How Depression Impacts the Body

- Significant, unintentional weight loss or weight gain
- Insomnia (not being able to sleep) or excessive sleeping
- Fatigue and loss of energy
- Moving at a slower pace
- Sadness or crying

Some Types of Depression

Major/Clinical Depression is severe and requires professional treatment. People who suffer from major depression are unable to meet their basic needs.

Dysthymia is a chronic, moderate type of depression that may not seem overwhelming. People who suffer from dysthymia can perform their normal day-to-day functions but seem consistently unhappy. Over a life-time dysthymia can have severe effects such as increased risk of suicide, work impairment and social isolation.



Rev. Reginald Holmes
Pastor – New Covenant
Christian Church
Denver, CO

"While some ministers are trained as mental health professionals, the expertise of most ministers lie in the areas of caring, loving, and nurturing people on a spiritual plane. None of us should feel as though we should minister to all the needs of the people. We should come together with physicians, psychiatrists and other professionals to collectively meet the needs of our people. The care of the mental and psychological needs of our people should be left to those who have been trained to do so."

Bipolar Disorder (Formerly manic-depressive) is characterized by extreme mood swing episodes that are referred to as manic, depressive or mixed.

- **Manic** – Feeling extremely happy, extremely irritable and anxious, talking too fast and too much and an unusual increase in energy and a reduced need for sleep.
- **Depressive** – Overwhelming feeling of emptiness, sadness, lack of energy, feeling useless/hopeless, and irritability.
- **Mixed** – Includes symptoms that are both manic and depressive.

Treatment for Depression

Over 80% of people with depression can be treated successfully. Treatment for depression include medication (antidepressants), "talk" therapy (psychotherapy) or a combination of therapies.

Depression in Children & Adolescents

Depression in children and adolescents can be characterized by:

- Poor grades/school attendance
- Poor familial and peer relationships
- Alcohol, drugs and being sexually active
- Isolation

Depression in Older Adults

Untreated depression in the elderly is the most common psychiatric disorder and the leading cause of suicide in this population. Those with untreated depression are more likely to have worse outcomes from treatment of co-existing medical illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes and heart disease.

What to do if You Think You May Have Symptoms of Depression

Everyone experiences life's everyday challenges including stress and other factors that interfere with ones quality of life. These do not always lead to chronic depression but, it is very important to be aware that if left unchecked, depression can lead to drastic changes in health and overall lifestyle. If you or someone you know is suffering from symptoms of depression and you are unsure about where to go for help, contact your physician, health clinic, spiritual leader or the resources listed on the next page.

Tips for Managing Stress
Chronic Stress Can Lead to Depression

✔ **Be realistic.**
Don't take on more than you can handle.

✔ **Shed the "superman/superwoman" urge.**
Ask for help when you need it.

✔ **Pray/Meditate.**
Set aside some "quiet" time.

✔ **Exercise.**
Physical activity benefits body and mind.

✔ **Healthy Lifestyle.** Good nutrition, adequate rest and balancing work and play.

✔ **Share your feelings.** Talk about your feelings and don't try to cope alone.

References

Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General. Available at: <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/chapter2/sec8.html>. Accessed March 24, 2007.

Broman, C. L. (1996). Coping with personal problems. In H. W. Neighbors & J. S. Jackson (Eds.), *Mental Health in Black America* (pp. 117–129). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Depression: Common depression (Dysthymia): From MedicineNet.com. Available at: <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=55163>. Accessed March 24, 2007.

Depression and African Americans: Not Just the Blues: From MentalHealthAmerica.net. Available at: <http://www.nmha.org/index.cfm?objectId=C7DF8C45-1372-4D20-C80E7F78C2F27791>. Accessed March 24, 2007.

Depression Awareness: From The University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. Available at: <http://www.uihealthcare.com/topics/mentalemotionalhealth/depressionawareness.html>. Accessed March 24, 2007.

What is Bipolar Disorder: From Bristol-Myers Squibb, A Treatment Option for Bipolar Disorder. Available at: http://abilify.com/abilify/channels/bipolar_content.jsp?BV_UseBVCookie=Yes&channelId=-11806&referrer=null. Accessed March 26, 2007.

Resources

The Denver – Rocky Mountain Association of Black Psychologists
303-534-3555

The Mental Health Center of Denver
www.mhcd.org
303-504-6500

The Mental Health Association of Colorado
www.mhacolorado.org
720-208-2220
800-456-3249



Marilyn Martin,
M.D., M.P.H
Baltimore, MD

"Stress will be a part of all of our lives. We have to accept this. What we don't have to accept is the idea that we are powerless to do anything about the stress we will face. Each of us needs to develop a stress management plan that we actively use. We must educate ourselves about depression and get screened for it. Depression is an illness, not a weakness. It can kill you or those you love when it is left untreated. It is a new day, and we must take care of ourselves in a HEALTHIER WAY!"

Depression and African Americans

Mission Statement

The Center for African American Health is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of the African-American community.



The Center for African American Health

Empowering the Community to

Live Well!

3601 Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
Denver, CO 80205
303-355-3423
303-355-1807 Fax

Please e-mail us at: info@caahealth.org
Please visit us at: www.caahealth.org

Support for this brochure provided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.



The Center for African American Health

Empowering the Community to

Live Well!