

Clinical Depression

by

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Contents

Preface	4
What Is Clinical Depression.....	5
Differentiating Between a Depressive Episode and Depression	5
Differentiating Between Bipolar Depression and Depression	7
When to Be Evaluated by an MD or Therapist	8
Types of Depression.....	10
Signs and Symptoms of Major Depression	14
Why Do People Have Depression	15
Coping Skills for Depression.....	16
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	18
Asking for Help.....	19

Preface

Depression is a real mental illness that affects millions of people around the world. Oftentimes, it goes unnoticed without people paying too much heed to it. Statistics show that 16.2 million adults in the US had at least one depressive episode in 2016. This is around 6.7% of the entire population. It is highly common in people between the ages of 18 to 25.

The one thing that people need to understand is that depression needs to be treated like any physical disease. Even treatment is not exactly straightforward as this mental disorder affects different people differently. There's a certain stigma around it, which is the main reason that people hesitate to ask for help. People who suffer from depression don't recognize it as a mental health issue that they're facing. In fact, they just tell themselves to "buck up" and stop feeling the way they're feeling.

On the other hand, others are just going through a bad phase in life and call it depression. This is majorly due to the lack of awareness about depression. Most people don't really know what clinical depression is, what the types of depression are, what the signs are that can tell them that they might be suffering from depression and how their depression can be treated.

If you're afraid about how you feel and are hesitant to talk about it, you should know that your feelings are absolutely normal. Most people going through depression find it really hard to open up to someone and talk to them about their feelings. But what you need to realize is that it is really important to get help and get yourself treated. It is okay to see a therapist. They will only help you in the process of self-healing. This book aims to shed light on what exactly clinical depression is. It will talk about the different types of depression and will also talk about how you can get help if you are dealing with depressions.

What Is Clinical Depression

Clinical depression is a medical condition that is characterized by a constant feeling of despair and hopelessness. It has become quite a common medical condition in the modern age. There are a lot of people who find it difficult to work, eat, study or even go out with friends due to the fact that they suffer from clinical depression.

The effects of depression differ greatly from person to person. Some people tend to lose sleep, others tend to sleep more. Some people tend to lose appetite, others tend to eat more. It entirely depends on how the disorder has affected them. It is also known that sometimes depression is also passed on in families from one generation to the other, but more often than not, it also affects people who have no family history of depression.

Clinical depression is characterized by the feeling of lowness for most of the day, especially in the morning. Generally, it is also seen that people who suffer from depression tend to lose interest in a lot of normal activities. Their relationships are also greatly compromised because of this. Statistics show that between 20% and 25% of adults have chances of suffering from at least one episode of clinical depression at one point in their lives. Many times, it is also seen that depression goes undiagnosed and these people suffer without even knowing they are depressed.

Differentiating Between a Depressive Episode and Depression

Everyone feels sadness since it is a natural human emotion. There can be certain things in your life that don't go according to plan, you may lose something or someone you loved, or you may fail at something in life. All these things can cause you sadness, and it is natural to feel so.

Oftentimes, it is seen that people are not fully aware of what clinical depression is. If something goes wrong in their lives, or if something goes against what they wanted, then they tend to feel sad about it.

That is a depressive episode because they are suffering from situational or conditional sadness due to an external event. This usually doesn't last very long. Clinical depression, on the other hand, is a very serious condition that can have an impact on your life in different ways. It is of high importance to know the difference between a depressive episode and clinical depression. Clinical depression is a feeling of chronic sadness or feeling low most of the time and it doesn't happen because something has gone wrong in your life. It doesn't need any reason to happen. There can be certain triggers, of course, but it can also happen when everything in your life is just the way it should be.

In medical terms, situational depression is known as "adjustment disorder with depressed mood." It can take some time until you can fully solve this problem. However, no matter how long it takes, you eventually heal and your mental state gets better. Clinical depression, if not diagnosed in time and if the individual is not given the help that they need, can develop further and can have a negative impact on the person. It is also seen that in certain circumstances, people also turn suicidal if this is left to develop, untreated.

It is important to know some key differences between the two types of depression so that a person can get just the right treatment that they need to heal. Firstly, it's important to note that no type of depression is more "real" than the other. Situational depression and clinical depression both can take a toll on the individual and they both need to be treated so that a person can resume a normal life. Situational depression usually happens as a result of any traumatic event that a person goes through in life. Another name that is used to describe this kind of depression is "adjustment disorder." A few examples of such events that may affect an individual negatively are the death of a close one, divorce, the loss of a job, an accident, or even major life changes like retirement. A person can recover from this type of depression once they come to terms with it and make a conscious effort to get over it or to start

afresh. It is also very commonly seen that people who suffer from this kind of depression usually talk to someone about their feelings. This helps them deal with their feelings and speeds up the healing time.

Here are a few symptoms of situational depression:

- Listlessness
- Feelings of despair and hopelessness
- Sleeping problems
- Frequent crying episodes
- Excessive anxiety
- Lack of concentration
- Withdrawal from normal activities
- Suicidal thoughts

It is seen that those people who suffer from an episode that hurts them emotionally tend to see symptoms of situational depression within 90 days of the event happening.

Clinical depression, on the other hand, is a lot more severe than situational depression. It is known to interfere with daily life functions. This is because the neurotransmitters in the body are disturbed. A major life event or a traumatic experience can also lead to clinical depression if a person doesn't resort to getting any kind of help. Genetic factors, alcohol, and drug dependence can also be major reasons for clinical depression. A person's bodily functions can severely be impacted by depression.

Differentiating Between Bipolar Depression and Depression

Many similarities can be seen between bipolar depression and depression. However, the key difference between the two is that bipolar depression or bipolar disorder has certain depressive episodes, but depression is "unipolar." This means that there are no "up" periods in depression. Depression is

characterized solely by low feelings. Bipolar disorder, on the other hand, is characterized by mania as well.

In bipolar disorder, there are many extreme mood swings that a person goes through. There are great feelings of “high,” when a person feels like they’re on the top of the world. Another name that is given to bipolar disorder is “manic depression.” People who suffer from bipolar disorder will have feelings of being severely depressed for hours at a stretch. This can also extend to days, weeks or months. After these depressive episodes, there are periods of severe mania. This, again, can last for many days or months at a stretch. There is a type of bipolar disorder where a person might feel manic and depressive symptoms at the very same time. They might feel sad and restless at the same time. Usually, a manic episode is characterized by energetic feelings. The person starts talking faster and also starts thinking at a much faster pace. They also start feeling highly productive all of a sudden. It is very easy to recognize a person who is suffering from a manic episode.

When to Be Evaluated by an MD or Therapist

A doctor of medicine or a therapist can easily diagnose depression by asking simple questions about your medical history and also a few symptoms that you might be experiencing. A lot of people who are suffering from depression hesitate to get help due to society’s attitude when it comes to this mental disorder. To date, depression is considered to be a taboo topic, and people don’t recognize it to be an issue that needs to be treated. People often start feeling that it is their fault that they are feeling this way. They tend to blame themselves and also hesitate to talk to others about how they feel. This makes the situation even worse.

A person who is suffering from depression themselves might not even be able to recognize the problem. The family members or friends need to encourage them to get help when they see signs and symptoms of depression. There are no specific tests that can detect whether a person is suffering from depression.

The person needs to be evaluated by a physician who can then diagnose the patient to see whether they're really suffering from depression or if their feelings are a result of a certain medical condition.

Depressive episodes can last any length of time, varying from person to person and the severity of depression. If depression goes untreated for a long time, it can even become a chronic problem, taking a toll on the person's life for good. Getting checked by a therapist can help shorten the duration of the depressive episodes and can also help lessen the severity.

So now the real question is – when should you seek help? In most cases, the person is not able to recognize that they are suffering. But if they do, then the first thing that they should do is ask for help from a professional. They can also talk to a family member or a close friend and tell them about how they are feeling. The family members or friends can then help the individual by connecting them with a therapist. If you ever see any of your family members or friends suffering from any signs and symptoms of depression, then you should get help for them, and you should also talk to them and encourage them to talk to a therapist. The one thing that you need to remember is that you shouldn't wait once you see the symptoms. You should immediately get help so that you can help ease the person's suffering and stop the problem from getting even worse.

Types of Depression

It is very important to be able to distinguish between the different types of depression. The symptoms might seem to be the same for many of them, but in essence, the types of depression are really different from each other.

Mentioned below are the many different types of depression.

Major Depression

This is also known as major depressive disorder. It is known that around 16.2 million adults in the US have experienced at least one major depressive episode in their lives. As such, this type of depression is the most common. People who suffer from major depression feel low most of the time. Seemingly, they can have the most ideal life one can dream of, with a loving family, a great car, a very high paying job and so on. However, on the inside, they are just unhappy. There is no obvious reason for their depression, but they still feel extremely sad almost all the time. Some people who suffer from major depression might have one depressive episode throughout their lives, whereas others experience it all throughout their lives. Major depression is known to cause a lot of problems in a person's daily lives in terms of hindering the activities they would usually take part in.

Persistent Depression

This type of depression lasts for at least two years. Another name given to this type of depression is chronic depression or dysthymia. This does not affect a person's daily life as much as major depression, but this, too causes great difficulties for a person, making their everyday tasks a lot more difficult while also straining their relationships. It can be said that this type of depression is a more long term one. Here are a few symptoms of persistent depression:

- Deep feelings of hopelessness
- Low self-esteem
- Lack of interest in things that a person once loved doing
- Appetite changes
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Concentration problems
- Memory problems
- Difficulty functioning at school
- Difficulty functioning at work
- Feeling no joy even at happy occasions
- Social withdrawal

It is seen that the severity of these symptoms becomes lesser for months on end and then worsen again after some time. Some people also suffer from major depression as well as persistent depression side by side, suffering from episodes of each. This is also known as double depression.

Manic Depression or Bipolar Disorder

This has been mentioned in the earlier chapter as well. To recap, this type of depression is characterized by alternating episodes of depression and mania. To be diagnosed with bipolar 1 disorder, a person needs to have a manic episode that lasts seven days or more. The depressive episodes have the same

symptoms as those of major depression. The manic episodes, on the other hand, are seen to include the following:

- High energy
- Reduced sleep
- Highly irritable behavior
- Fast thoughts and speech
- High self-esteem
- Risky behavior
- Feelings of “high” or euphoria

In severe cases of bipolar disorder, it is also seen that people have hallucinations and delusions.

Depressive Psychosis

This type of depression is characterized by losing touch with reality. This, too, comes with its fair share of hallucinations and delusions. Hallucinations are when people see, smell, hear, and feel things that aren't really there. An example of this would be seeing someone in front of you when they aren't really present there. A delusion can also be when people believe something to be true when it really isn't. To people who are going through this problem, all these beliefs seem to be very real. This type of depression can also cause physical problems like losing the ability to sit still and also slow physical movements.

Perinatal depression

This is a type of depression that is specific to females. It usually happens during pregnancy. It also happens within four weeks of giving birth. It is termed as Perinatal depression. This usually happens due to the hormonal changes that happen in the body at the time of pregnancy. It is these hormonal changes that lead to drastic mood changes as well. In addition, the woman also doesn't get enough sleep during and after pregnancy which further contributes to the feelings of depression. Women who don't usually have any support at the time of their pregnancy, and those who have had depression in the past are at a higher risk of getting this type of depression. Nonetheless, it can happen to anyone.

Here are a few of the symptoms of perinatal depression:

- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Feelings of extreme tiredness
- Excessive worrying about the baby
- Difficulty caring for the baby and themselves
- Thoughts of self-harm or harm to the baby

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder

This is a more severe form of premenstrual syndrome. The symptoms of premenstrual dysphoric disorder are known to be psychological to a great extent are much more severe than those associated with PMS. Some women who suffer from this type of depression experience a very severe type of sadness that affects their day to day activities. Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder is known to be related to hormonal changes as well. The symptoms of this type of depression are seen right after ovulation,

and they get a lot better once a woman's period starts. Some women are not able to effectively differentiate between PMS and premenstrual dysphoric disorder. That leads to the problem becoming a lot more severe. Some even tend to have suicidal thoughts when they experience this type of depression.

Seasonal Depression

This is also known as seasonal affective disorder. This is the same as having major depressive disorder except that the depressive episodes come in seasonal patterns. This type of depression is most commonly seen in the winters. Symptoms tend to start showing up in the fall, and then they continue through the winter period. As the season progresses, this kind of depression tends to get even worse. As spring starts approaching, the symptoms get better. A plausible explanation for this is the bodily rhythms in the body due to the increase the light.

A few symptoms of seasonal depression include:

- Social withdrawal
- Increased sleep
- Weight gain
- Feelings of sadness or hopelessness

Situational Depression

This, too has been discussed in the earlier chapter. To recap, it mainly has to do with certain events in one's life that have a negative impact on them. These can include the death of a loved one, unemployment, divorce, illness, and so on. It is natural to feel sad when something like this happens to you, but people who suffer from situational depression are not able to come out of that sad phase. For them, it just worsens by the day. They get affected to such a great extent that their daily activities start getting affected greatly. Usually, the symptoms of situational depression start within three months of the event happening. The symptoms include:

- Crying episodes
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Appetite changes
- Lack of energy
- Low concentration levels
- Social withdrawal
- Sleeping issues
- Aches and pains in the body

Atypical Depression

This type of depression usually tends to go away when certain positive things in life happen. A doctor might term this type of depression as major depressive disorder with atypical features. This type of depression isn't rare, contrary to popular belief. It is a very challenging type of depression because the affected person doesn't "seem" to be depressed.

What type of depression do I have?

Even though you're now aware of the different types of depression, you cannot diagnose yourself and find out which one you're suffering from. You need to seek help from a medical professional who is much more knowledgeable in this regard and will be able to guide you with regard to this. If you are someone who has never experienced depression before and are unaware of how to go about it, then the one thing that you should do first is to go to your primary care physician who will then guide you from there.

When you go to your physician to get yourself diagnosed, you should first tell them all about the symptoms that you are facing. Once you do that, you also need to tell them how your daily life is being affected by these symptoms. It is also very essential that you tell them about your medical history and if there are any medicines that you are taking. They also ought to know if you have a family history of depression.

Signs and Symptoms of Major Depression

We have already talked about how being sad is definitely not synonymous with being depressed. Major depression is a serious medical problem that you need to look out for so that you can get help at the soonest in the best possible way. On depression, Michelle London has said, "Depression is a cruel disease that can affect anyone. It is very easy, once the symptoms begin, for a person to slide down the black hole of depression where the symptoms spiral and feed off of each other, increasing in severity."

Here are a few of the symptoms of major depression:

Hopeless Outlook

People who are suffering from depression don't see any light at the end of the tunnel. It affects the way that they see life in general. They don't have anything to look forward to owing to the fact that their outlook on life generally becomes dull. They feel like life doesn't have anything good to offer to them. This is one of the most common feelings of people who suffer from depression. Alongside feeling hopeless at all times, people who are depressed also doubt their self-worth. They start loathing themselves and also feel guilty for no apparent reason. They think that everything that is going wrong is their fault.

Lost Interest

People who suffer from depression lose interest in the things that they would otherwise be interested in. Depression is mainly known to take all the pleasure out of life. You might suddenly not want to play the sport that you always loved to. You might not feel like going out with your friends. You might lose interest in sex.

Increased Fatigue and Sleep Issues

People who have depression almost always feel lethargic. They don't feel like indulging in a lot of activities because they are always tired and they want to stay in bed most of the time. Excessive sleeping is very commonly known to be associated with depression. However, on the other hand, sleeplessness is also known to be a huge problem with those suffering from depression.

Basically it differs from person to person. Regardless, the person's quality of sleep is affected and that is also one major reason why people who are depressed are almost always low on energy. The lack of quality sleep also leads to anxiety to a great extent.

Anxiety

Research has shown that depression doesn't cause anxiety necessarily, but they both go hand in hand. People who are depressed often feel nervous and restless at most times. They also have a very fast heart rate and breathing pace. Additionally, they also sweat heavily. Muscle trembling or muscle twitching is another common symptom in these people. They find it extremely difficult to focus on things and are also unable to put forward their thoughts clearly. The extreme worry can be seen on their faces.

Irritability

Depression usually causes a person to be extremely irritable. They get hyped up by any little thing that someone says to them. They might also indulge in risky behavior. This symptom is more common in men

than it is in women, and it is seen that men who are suffering from depression get extremely irritable, which then leads to substance abuse and bouts of extreme anger.

Changes in Appetite and Weight

People suffering from depression see major changes in their appetite. Some are seen to have increased appetite, which eventually leads to weight gain. Others are seen to lose appetite, which eventually leads to weight loss for them. It just depends on how sadness affects their mood. Some people don't feel like eating when they are sad. Others just resort to eating uncontrollably because it makes them feel better. Those who resort to comfort food tend to eat high-calorie foods like sweets, which means that they put themselves at risk of health conditions like heart disease and diabetes. An indication of whether or not the weight gain is due to depression is if the appetite changes are deliberate.

Uncontrollable Emotions

People suffering from depression are not able to channel their emotions. They feel rage to such an extent that they want to break something. However, the next moment, they might feel so sad that they start crying uncontrollably.

Thoughts about Death

Depression and suicide are very closely related. In 2017, over 47173 people committed suicide due to depression in the United States. People who commit suicide due to depression are known to show signs of suicidal thoughts very early on. These people don't see any reason to live because they have lost hope in all that life has to offer. They also often resort to self-harm. People who have suicide as an option tend to make an attempt or two first before they actually commit the act. If you see someone who has suicidal thoughts due to depression, the first thing that you should do is ensure that they get help. Remove any harmful tools that are around them – knives or blades. You should also try to get them to talk. Talking to someone about this makes it all a lot better. But generally, it is seen that people who have suicidal thoughts are not open to talking. They stay in their own shells.

It is important to know that different people experience depression in different ways. These symptoms are not common to all. A teenager might experience depression in a way that is very different from a pregnant woman or a grown man, for that matter. That is why it is extremely crucial to get yourself checked by a professional. You cannot compare yourself to someone else who is suffering from depression, because the way that you're suffering might be entirely different from how they are suffering. Some people might see only one symptom, whereas others might see all. The severity of the symptoms also varies greatly depending on what stage the person is at.

Why People Have Depression

There is no one explanation as to why people get depressed. There are different reasons for it. Here are some of them:

Genes

Research shows that sometimes, depression is passed on in families. Some people inherit these genes. But this is only one of the reasons. There are a lot of people who have depression but they haven't inherited it. In fact, most people who suffer from depression have no family history of depression.

Brain Chemistry

The neurotransmitters in the brain affect a person's mood. A plausible reason for why a person might be depressed is that the neurotransmitters in the brain are low in supply or are not effective enough. Genes and brain chemistry can be related to each other. If someone has the genes for depression, the chances that their neurotransmitters are not very effective are very high.

Stress, Health, and Hormones

When a person is stressed, it can greatly affect their brain chemistry, which, in turn, affects their mood. In addition to that, if a person uses drugs or goes through any hormonal changes that might be due to any changes in the body, that is also known to affect their mood greatly. Moreover, some health conditions can also cause depression. For example, it is seen that a lot of people who suffer from hypothyroidism are depressed. When these health conditions are diagnosed and proper treatment is prescribed, the depression symptoms usually disappear.

Daylight and Seasons

Daylight is known to affect melatonin and serotonin. These are what regulate a person's sleeping cycles, mood, and also their energy levels. In the previous chapter, we talked about how seasonal depression happens due to the change in light. This point further elaborates on how daylight affects a person's mood and depression symptoms.

Life Events

This has also been discussed in the earlier chapters. When a person goes through any sad or traumatic episode in their lives, it can make them depressed. Whether or not such sad episodes lead to depression depends entirely on how a person is able to deal with these situations and the kind of support they have.

Family and Social Environment

The kind of people that a person has around him also greatly affects their mood. A stressful family atmosphere, unsupportive friends, poverty, and violence all come under negative factors that can lead to the onset of depression in a person.

Coping Skills for Depression

The first thing that should come to your mind if you start to experience symptoms of depression is to go to seek help from a medical practitioner. If you have already been diagnosed with depression, then here are a few coping mechanisms that you can follow:

Talk to someone

You should really have someone that you can talk to at all times when you feel really low. This can help make you feel comfortable. You will feel like you have released a lot of stress. People often seem to undermine the importance of this, but it can work wonders. This person can be anyone like your mom, a sibling, a best friend, or even a therapist. You should talk to someone who makes YOU feel better.

Do things that make you feel good

In order to deal with depression, you should indulge in absolutely anything that makes you feel good and light on the inside. This can be absolutely anything like dancing, singing, painting, watching movies, hanging out with your friends, etc. When you do things that you like, you will at least temporarily be able to make yourself feel better and release stress.

Support your health

You need to make a conscious effort to ensure that you get an ample amount of sleep (8 hours). Depression is usually associated with sleeping problems, so you need to make sure that you get enough sleep by making a deliberate effort. You should keep stress in check and also you should practice certain relaxation techniques. These can be anything like meditating or penning your thoughts down in a diary. In addition, you should also ensure that you keep yourself well fed. Eating an ample amount of food is needed to keep your energy levels high, which will help you fight off the lethargy that you'll inevitably feel if you're depressed.

Get moving

Exercise is one of the most important tools that can help you boost your mood. You should aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise each day. This can be anything like walking, running, or indulging in sports like swimming or tennis. It will help you release a lot of stress and will also work wonders in keeping you active. Pairing up with an exercise partner can help if you're very lazy and never feel like exercising.

A daily dose of sunlight

Make sure to get some sun. That can bring your serotonin levels up and will help boost your mood. You must get at least 15 minutes of sunlight each day. You don't necessarily have to go and sit under the sun and do nothing else. You can have your coffee outside in the yard or even spend some time gardening.

Challenge negative thinking

Whenever you start having negative thoughts, you need to make a conscious effort to tell yourself that these thoughts are just temporary and that there is so much in life that you have to look forward to. Make an effort to focus on all the good things in life. You can also focus on the people who don't have all that you have. That can help you feel blessed and stay happy.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy is a type of psychotherapy for depression. It is known to greatly help those suffering from depression. CBT usually involves modifying thought patterns in order to alter a person's mood. The main idea behind it is that all negative actions happen because of distorted thoughts or beliefs or any subconscious forces from the past.

CBT is a mix of behavioral therapy and cognitive therapy. It is known to be greatly effective for people whose depression is mild or moderate. It mainly works by way of the therapist helping the person identify all negative thoughts that they might have and then working on converting those thoughts into healthier positive ones. The therapist should be one who is highly skilled so that CBT actually works for the patient.

For example, a person might feel that there is a lot of wrong that is happening because of them. A therapist will first work towards helping them identify and be aware of the fact that they have these thoughts. Then, they will help them swap these with positive thoughts. The therapist can, for example, work towards making the person believe that whatever is destined to happen happens and that no one person can be blamed for something that happens. They can make the person see the good in them so that they can realize that there is nothing wrong with them.

Many times, therapists ask patients to keep a journal with them where they list down all the negative thoughts that come to their mind as and when they come. The patient is asked to record their life events in this journal and break down their reactions as to how they felt at that moment in time. Here are a few things that the therapist helps the patient with:

- Learning to control negative thoughts
- Learning to channel their behavior in a more appropriate way
- Practicing self-talk that is highly balanced
- Evaluating one's own self and reactions to different situations

CBT is known to be a short term approach to dealing with depression. It only requires 10 to 20 sessions on the whole and is usually practiced in controlled settings. However, it can also be done in the patient's home or any place that the patient himself is comfortable with. On the whole, CBT focuses on helping the patient improve their current state of mind and helps them look beyond any episodes in the past that might have affected them in a negative way.

Asking for Help

Given that there is a taboo around depression in most societies today, people hesitate when it comes to talking about it. They feel like they will be extremely exposed when they talk about how they feel. They start feeling highly exposed. But the fact of the matter is that you need to realize that it is extremely crucial that you get help. You need to realize that depression is a problem that has a solution, and you need to make sure that you get yourself out of it.

You can start by reaching out to whoever you are comfortable with. If you are comfortable with talking to a family member or a friend then do that. If you want to talk to someone who doesn't know anything about you, then you can do that as well. Do what works for you. Whatever you try, as long as you're talking to someone, it will help. In order to get help, you need to first come to terms and accept the fact that you are not okay. Most people fail to get help because they don't even acknowledge the fact that there is something wrong with them.

Most people are also scared of getting a diagnosis. When you can live a happy life, why wouldn't you want to? You aren't getting anything out of suffering. It is only harmful to YOU, and it is only making YOU feel worse. You need to understand that, just like any other physical problem, depression is a mental health issue that needs to be addressed.