



Who is at Risk for Depression?

Depression is a huge problem and it is growing. It is the number one psychological disorder in Western society and the most expensive cost in the US health care system.

Various research studies suggest that between 6.6% (National Comorbidity Study – Replication, 2003) up to 12% (Jacobs, D. 2005) of US adults per year meet criteria for diagnosis with a major depressive disorder. Up to 20% will have symptoms of depression. Lifetime rates are generally believed to be between 16% and 20% who will have at least one episode of clinical depression. Approximately 35 to 40 million Americans will be diagnosed, with more than half having recurrent episodes.

Rates for depression for those who have been born after 1945 are 10 times higher than those who were born before 1945, which strongly suggests that depression is increasing as a result of social and cultural factors. (Rates in industrialized societies are rising while more traditional societies have seen less increase.)

Depression is about twice as likely to be diagnosed in women as in men (with men much more likely to be diagnosed with an alcohol addiction). The majority of individuals with depressive symptoms will not seek treatment or will be offered treatment that does not meet minimal standards.

Primary care physicians are often the first to diagnose this condition (42% of those with clinical depression and 47% of those with generalized anxiety disorder) and they are most likely to treat it with medication rather than making a referral to a mental health professional. The National Comorbidity Survey – Replication estimated that only 12.7% of individuals treated in the general medical sector received minimally adequate care.

It can happen to anyone of any age, background, lifestyle or nationality. The average age of first onset is 25-29, although depression can be diagnosed in childhood and some individuals do not have their first episode until much later in life. Genetics appear to play a role in some depression but environmental factors are at least as important (and probably more important) in triggering a depressive disorder.

Depression is not a problem that occurs in isolation. It often co-occurs with other mental health and substance abuse issues and it can be present during serious medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, or cancer.

It is essential to screen for this disorder and to take it seriously.