

EVEN COWBOYS GET THE BLUES

Men can be pretty dumb when it comes to dealing with emotional problems. Suffering from the burden of testosterone, men still think they must convey the image of strength. This invariably means not admitting that they might be miserable. Nothing should really bother or get to them. If it does, they should handle it on their own. Guys look upon depression as something that really doesn't happen to them. Therefore, if it doesn't happen to them, they don't have it and definitely don't have to get help. Can't argue with logic.

It is estimated that 14 million adults in the U.S. experienced depression in the past year and that 35 million people experience a bad depression, meaning getting in the way of living, at some time in their lives. One-third of these people are MEN. That means there are a lot of fellows out there who have clinical depression. And it's very likely that many of these men will not admit that they're depressed. Although women attempt suicide more, men are more likely to succeed. As they age, the risk of suicide increases in males, especially if they're also overusing alcohol. Men often do not present the typical picture of a depressed person who is subdued, withdrawn and avoiding others. Men, in fact, may be attempting to ward off a depression by being more intense, controlling or argumentative. As their irritability increases, they push away those who love and want to help them. Not infrequently, they may turn to alcohol and/or other drugs to self-medicate which only serves to disguise the problem more.

I have found that it is frequently the woman in the man's life who diagnoses the problem and then insists on his getting treatment. Typically, a guy will show up at my office and say, "I don't know why I'm here, but my wife (girlfriend, partner) thinks I'm depressed." More often than not, he *is* depressed. It is only after he has received some treatment and sees a change that he *may* realize this. One fellow, who was a very irritable and faultfinding person at home, returned after treatment with a medication. When I asked how he was feeling, said, "I don't notice anything different, but my wife says that if you stop the medicine expect big trouble from her!"

You might have depression if:

- You are persistently sad or unhappy or 'empty'
- You are tired all of the time whereas in the past you were not
- You have trouble concentrating

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- You feel overwhelmed
- You are not yourself (withdrawn when usually social or irritable when usually even-tempered).
- You think being dead might not be so bad
- You are not sleeping and/or eating well
- You feel guilty, hopeless or helpless
- You have lost your interest in things

With *males*, add these signs and symptoms:

- He is always negative about life (glass half-empty)
- He is frequently impatient and irritable
- He finds fault with others (lays the guilt on)
- He is overly controlling
- He has an alcohol problem
- He is more and more driven in his life

Especially important is whether there is a family history of depression. Medical studies increasingly show that heredity plays a large part in depression. Depression is not a “failing” in how a person copes with life but a chemical imbalance. When depression is bad enough to affect your everyday life as well as those around you, it’s not something you can ‘fix’ easily on your own.

There are a variety of treatments for depression. The most successful appears to be a combination of antidepressant medication (remember, it is a chemical imbalance) and what is called ‘cognitive therapy’ (talking therapy that focuses on the person’s bleak view of the world and how to change that). Depression has never been more treatable than it is now. If you feel you know a man (or woman) who may be depressed, twist their arm and get them to seek help.

The National Institute of Mental Health has an excellent web page called *Real Men, Real Depression* located @ <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/men-and-depression/index.shtml>

Dr. K.