

DOWN IN THE DUMPS

Depression or Just Feeling Low?

Henry Lew, psychologist, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics, delves into the minds of two women who are purportedly down in the dumps and sets the record straight on what is and what is not depression.



Photo Credit: Juriah Mosin

Depression is a word that is often used loosely to refer to someone who is sad and feeling low. Most of us experience 'depressed' moods at one point or another, but it may not necessarily be depression. Depression is much more than just feeling unhappy, miserable or despondent.

The following are samples of recorded conversations of someone who is suffering from depression (Mdm Tan) and another who is experiencing a "depressed" mood (Ms Jones):

Depression as a result of the loss of a loved one is normal and allows one to feel and overcome grief. It also provides an opportunity for reflection. For others, depression may sap the energy and affect them so strongly that they cannot function effectively, for example, their productivity decreases at work and they may not even be able to take care of themselves.

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These individuals may have problems responding to their medical treatment or they may develop other chronic illnesses.

Physical effects of depression include aches and pains, weight-loss, constipation, loss of appetite, no interest in sex. Measures that may help one to cope with depression include establishing a routine of pleasant activity, for example, walking in the park every morning at the same time and talking to friends.

If the situation does not improve, however, it would be advisable to seek help from a professional counsellor, social worker and psychologist. Sometimes, it may be necessary to consult a psychiatrist or doctor for treatment and medication.

Scenario	Depression? X or ✓
Mdm Tan: "I have been feeling very tired lately... I don't know why. I just do a bit of housework, yet I feel tired. Sometimes I just leave them undone, like the dishes... I can leave them overnight or for one day before I wash them. I am so useless, am I not? Cannot even do a bit of work, so lazy of me. I lie in bed for hours before I fall asleep. I have cut down on the amount food I eat. Sigh....I try to occupy myself reading or watching TV but I cannot even concentrate. Sometimes I even forget where I put my things or what I am supposed to do. I don't feel like going out or mixing with my friends. They won't understand me... It is too tiring to go out. I don't see any point in life. Sometimes I wonder why I have to carry on living. I think about my past and I cry uncontrollably...At other times I get irritable ... I don't know what is happening to me...I have been like this for the past six months and I have lost my job because I am not able to wake up to go to work.	Fatigue ✓ Low self-esteem ✓ Difficulty sleeping ✓ Loss of appetite ✓ Concentration problem ✓ Problem with memory ✓ Withdrawal ✓ Thoughts of suicide Low mood/emotional/irritable ✓ Cannot carry out daily tasks effectively ✓
Ms Jones: I cry sometimes since my husband passed away. Initially, I had difficulty sleeping, but it is getting better. For the first few weeks I had no mood to work, so I took a few days off. Slowly though, I am able to get back to work. Now, I am all right. I spend my time walking my dog or taking care of my children. It is sad and I need time to get over it, but I believe I will be able to do well.	Getting better X Ability to manage negative emotions and carry out daily tasks X