

[Black Mental Health Awareness] Confronting Depression

Being aware is just part of the solution. You've also got to recognize when you or someone you know may be suffering

BY BESTIESMD, JULY 26, 2016

COMMENTS



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In the current times filled with racial tensions, unnecessary deaths and terrorist attacks, it's easy to dismiss your feelings as appropriate responses. But if your feelings are those of hopelessness, a lack of self worth and overwhelm your impetus to perform day-to-day tasks, then it has become something more.

Creating a dialogue around taboo topics such as depression is the first step towards healing. The month of July is the perfect opportunity to start the discussion with observance of National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month.

Similar to [anxiety](#), depression comes in various forms. A few common types of depression include seasonal depression, postpartum depression and general depression. Seasonal Affective Disorder is a form depression that occurs during the winter months due to decreased daylight hours. In many cases Seasonal Affective Disorder is mild, but in rare cases it can be severe enough to inhibit day-to-day functions.

Postpartum depression is a severe long lasting form of the "baby blues." It is an overwhelming sadness that occurs within two weeks after having a baby, and it interferes with your ability to care for your newborn. Lastly, Generalized Depression involves feelings of extreme sadness for most times of day, almost every day for at least two weeks.

Despite the prevalence of mental illness among African Americans, the conversations around these conditions are still lacking. As a community, we make a great effort to manage chronic illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension, but ignore our mental health illnesses.

Unfortunately, depression is often perceived as a personal weakness. Feeling sad can be a normal reaction to the loss of a loved one, losing a job, or financial stressors. But when feelings of intense sadness lead to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and worthlessness, and dominate your thoughts and ability to function normally, then you are dealing with depression.

While a lot of the symptoms of clinical depression are seen in other conditions such as grief and an under-active thyroid, there are other unique signs that should not go unnoticed. Here are five key signs that you or someone you know may be depressed.

1. Sleep

Increased or decreased sleep can both be signs of major depression, with decreased sleep often being associated with early wakening.

2. Guilt

Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or hopelessness can be present in cases of major depression, with suicidal thoughts or actions being the extreme result. It is critical to seek help on your own or someone else's behalf if you witness suicidal thoughts or actions. Angry outbursts, irritability and/or frustration over the smallest of matters could also be a key sign that something more is going on.

3. Interest

Don't really feel like seeing your good girlfriends? Not taking that art class that you once loved? Decreased interest in the things or activities that used to once bring you joy is a major sign of depression. You may also note that it is difficult to concentrate or focus on your day-to-day activities such as completing projects at work or home.

4. Energy

Having decreased energy or feeling constant exhaustion is a more subtle sign of depression. It may be easy to blow these states of being off as simply having a busy life. However, exhaustion can manifest itself as debilitating fatigue that makes it difficult to even do your normal day-to-day activities. You may also see a decrease in libido, where more often than not you don't have the energy or desire to be intimate.

5. Weight

It may be intuitive to connect depression with a loss of appetite and subsequent weight loss. However, increased appetite and weight gain can also be a result of the disease. In this instance, food is used as a coping mechanism for the extreme emotions that come with depression.

If you think you are depressed, ask for help. And if you notice these signs in a loved one, seek help on their behalf. It's important to note that depression and anxiety can be treated with methods other than medication depending on severity. So don't let that be a deterrent. Start the conversation now. Let's stand together to bring mental health the forefront of our discussion without judgment, stigma or shame.

Dr. Gamell Dekayie-Amenu & Dr. Chantale Stephens-Archer are the co-founders of BestiesMD. As both best friends and physicians, they are committed to providing reliable women's health education on a relatable and sisterly level.

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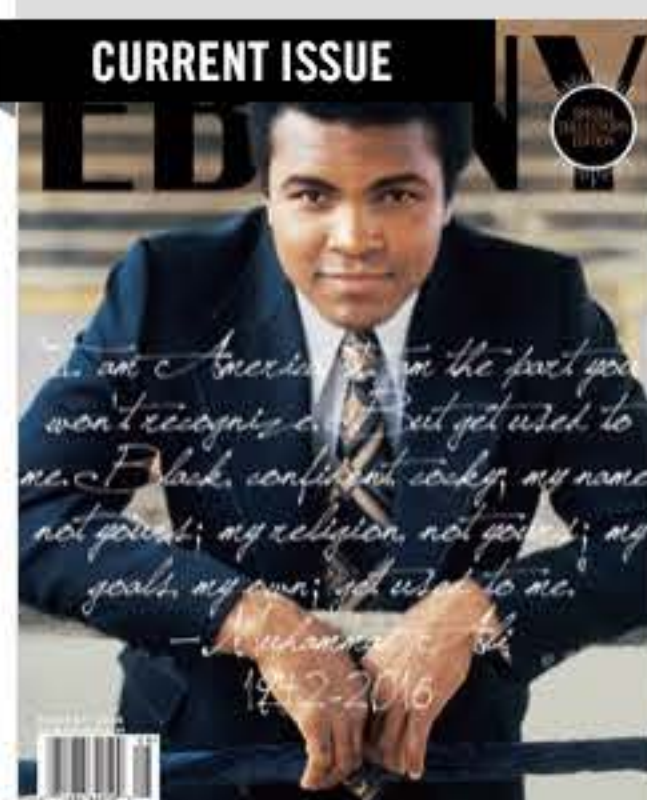
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