



## Pick Your Path to Health

### **Finding the Strength to Beat Depression**

Experiencing profound sadness during difficult times is part of life, but there is a difference between such periods of sadness and ongoing sadness, grief, or distress. In your day-to-day activities, it may be easy to overlook your feelings, but paying more attention to your feelings is a good way to make sure you stay healthy.

Depression affects about 19 million adults every day. People with a depressive illness cannot merely "pull themselves together" and get over it. A depressive disorder is an illness that involves the body, mood, and thoughts. It affects the way a person eats and sleeps, the way one feels about oneself, and the way one thinks about things. It is not the same as a passing blue mood and without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months, or years.

### **Stress and Depression**

Women experience depression twice as often as men. Hormonal factors are part of the problem, but many Asian American women also face additional stresses such as responsibilities at work and home, and caring for children and for aging parents. Also many Asian American women are not accustomed to sharing inner feelings or seeking help.

"It takes tremendous courage to take the step to find help," says Dr. D.J. Ida, Executive Director of the National Asian American Mental Health Association. "But these women will find that people do care and there are people to talk to that they can trust. Especially after September 11th, these women will recognize that feelings of depression are felt by many people and these do not need to be hidden at home."

Here is a list of the most common signs of depression. If these last for more than 2 weeks, talk to your doctor.

- An "empty" feeling, ongoing sadness, and anxiety.
- Tiredness, lack of energy.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in everyday activities, including sex.
- Sleep problems, including very early morning waking.
- Problems with eating and weight (gain or loss).
- A lot of crying.
- Aches and pains that just won't go away.

- A hard time focusing, remembering, or making decisions.
- Feeling that the future looks grim; feeling guilty, helpless, or worthless.
- Being irritable.
- Thoughts of death or suicide; a suicide attempt.

## **Suicide**

In certain cases, depression is so severe that suicide appears to be the only way out. Asian American women have the highest suicide rate among women ages 15 to 24 and those over age 65. Suicide is ranked 8th among the leading causes of death for Asian American and Pacific Islander women in the United States.

One possible explanation for the higher rate of suicide among Asian American women is that cultural barriers that keep them from seeking mental health support. Cultures in which counseling and psychotherapy are not widely used tend to have higher rates of suicide.

"Many cultures, particularly those with a Chinese background, often develop depression due to language barriers that prevent these women from finding jobs and developing a support system outside the home," explains Dr. Ida.

Seeking help can be difficult, but facing the problem is the way to overcome it. If you feel suicidal, call the National Hopeline Network at 1-800-SUICIDE. The hotline is a confidential service that will connect you to a counselor. Avoid drugs and alcohol. Most deaths by suicide are the result of impulsive behavior that involves drugs and alcohol.

If someone tells you they are thinking about suicide, you should take their distress seriously. Help them get to a professional for evaluation and treatment. If someone is in imminent danger of harming himself or herself, do not leave the person alone. You may need to take emergency steps to get help, such as calling 911. When someone is in a suicidal crisis, it is important to limit access to firearms or other lethal means of committing suicide.

## **Tips to Stay Healthy**

- Speak with someone you trust. Approach a friend, family member, or pastor to discuss your feelings.
- Go to your local clinic to see a mental health therapist.

- Break large tasks into small ones, set some priorities, and do what you can as you can.
- Learn to play. Find pastimes to escape from the pressures of life, such as participating in gatherings that make you feel better.
- Stay active. Go to a movie, a ballgame, or attend religious, social, or other activities you may enjoy.
- Exercise as often as possible.
- Expect your mood to improve gradually. Feeling better may take time.
- Keep a journal with your thoughts each day. Write down your experiences, activities and feelings. Look at what you have accomplished, and set attainable goals for the future.

Just like your body, your mental health needs attention and caring. Start today on the path to better health.

### **Where To Get Help**

You may want to visit your local clinic to ask what services they can offer you. If unsure where to go for help, check the Yellow Pages under "mental health," "health," "social services," "suicide prevention," "crisis intervention services," "hotlines," "hospitals," or "physicians" for phone numbers and addresses. In times of crisis, the emergency room doctor at a hospital may be able to provide temporary help for an emotional problem, and will be able to tell you where and how to get further help.

### **Resources**

National Institute of Mental Health  
 Depression brochures: 1-800-421-4211  
 TTY: 1-301-443-8431  
 FAX4U: 1-301-443-5158  
 Website: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>  
 E-mail: [nimhinfo@nih.gov](mailto:nimhinfo@nih.gov)

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill  
 Telephone: 1-800-950-NAMI  
 Website: <http://www.nami.org>

*A support and advocacy organization of consumers, families, and friends of people with severe mental illness-over 1,200 state and local affiliates. Local affiliates often give guidance to finding treatment.*

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)  
1-800-826-3632

Website: <http://www.DBSAlliance.org>

*An association that educates patients, families, and the public concerning the nature of depressive illnesses. Maintains an extensive catalog of helpful books.*

National Foundation for Depressive Illness, Inc.  
1-800-239-1265

Website: <http://www.depression.org>

*A foundation that informs the public about depressive illness and its treatability and promotes programs of research, education, and treatment.*

National Mental Health Association  
1-800-969-6642

FAX: 1-703-684-5968

TTY: 1-800-433-5959

Website: <http://www.nmha.org>

*An association that works with 340 affiliates to promote mental health through advocacy, education, research, and services.*

*Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."*