

TUNE TO THE EXPERT TIPS TO BEAT DEPRESSION
BY ELISE OBERLIESEN

Does your mood ever feel like a pair of worn out jeans? Ragged, faded and frayed on the edges. Holes in the knees become normal marks of wear and tear. Perhaps you ask: “Am I depressed?” The lack of energy and persistent dark fog follows you like a shadow that’s permanently attached with superglue.

Blood tests or a saliva swabs won’t reveal the answer with a diagnosis. While brain scans may offer a few clues, their cost makes it unthinkable for many people.

Depression affects women twice as much as men, though it’s not fully understood why. About 66 percent of those with depression refuse treatment, according to the Department of Psychiatry at Washington

University in St. Louis. Many experts believe the stigma attached to mental health disorders deters many from getting help.

Typical signs of depression include sadness, sleeping too much or too little, irritability, changes in appetite, avoiding social situations or a loss of sexual desire, said Chris Berger, MA NCC, counselor at Foundations Counseling. “As a mental

health counselor, we don’t want to overlook the physiological side; eating, sleeping and exercise,” Berger said.

Berger said it’s important to watch for the less obvious signs of depression. “It’s important not to jump to a diagnosis. Instead, we need to slow down and understand what’s going on with a person,” Berger said. For starters, it’s important to understand what caused

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depressive symptoms in the first place. Mental health Professionals rely on the DSM IV Manual to help diagnose and treat the plethora of mental disorders.

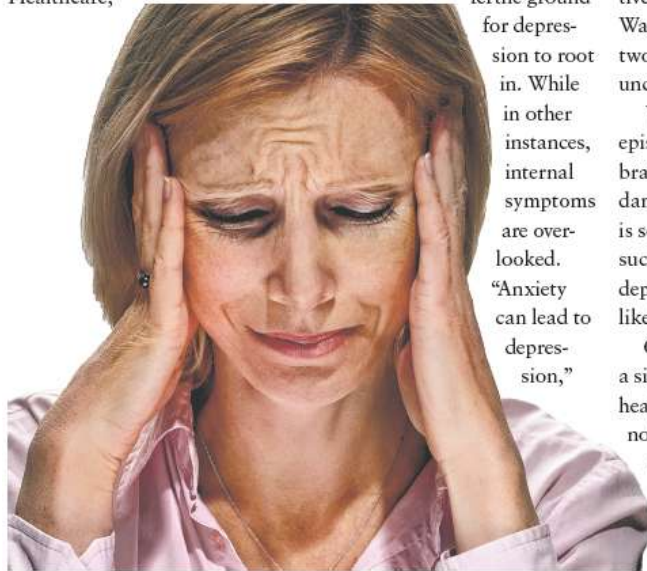
“There may be different causes of depression for different people,” said Psychiatrist Dr. Kenneth Watanabe, medical director at Mountain Crest Behavioral Healthcare,

part of Poudre Valley Health System.

Just because you’re not crying for hours, or zoning out in front of the TV, doesn’t mean depression isn’t stirring around. While it seems innocuous, some people even report feelings of boredom or lack of interest, Watanabe added.

Sometimes external factors like job loss or a death create

fertile ground for depression to root in. While in other instances, internal symptoms are overlooked. “Anxiety can lead to depression,”



Berger said. It’s important to recognize feeling blue, isn’t the same as depression, said Watanabe. “When we’re talking about clinical depression, we’re talking about when depression becomes an actual physiologic disorder; changes are occurring, physically to the body,” he said.

“You may classify depression as a neurodegenerative disease, like Alzheimer’s,” Watanabe added. Whether the two disorders are linked, is unclear.

With each depressive episode, Watanabe said the brain may undergo physical damage. One reason treatment is so important is that each successive episode of depression increases your likelihood of future relapse.

Genetic risk factors also play a significant role in our mental health. The DSM IV Manual notes that, “Family histories of major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder are common in those with major depressive disorder,

but a family history of bipolar disorder may indicate increased risk of bipolar disorder in the patient.”

Proactive Approach to Happiness

When Berger works with depressed clients in talk therapy, he said it’s important to know how they spend their free time and what matters most to them. “Helping ourselves find a sense of purpose,” Berger said, is one way to find meaning in life, and ease depression.

“Find a way to inject greater purpose in your life,” Berger said. For some people, finding their purpose begins when they browse library shelves and simply feed their curiosity. Sometimes it happens from meeting a friend for coffee, Berger said. Ultimately, these small steps, he goes on, can lead to discoveries — the kind that makes us feel better. “People try to rush the process, sometimes it takes time,” Berger said.

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