

H3-2 College Students and Depression

College offers new experiences and challenges. This can be exciting, but it can also cause stress and, in some cases, lead to depression. Clinical depression is a common, frequently unrecognized condition that can be effectively treated.

Common Stressors in College Life

- Greater academic demands
- Being on your own in a new environment
- Changes in family relations
- Financial responsibilities
- Changes in your social life
- Exposure to new people, ideas, and temptations
- Awareness of your sexual identity and orientation
- Preparing for life after graduation

Symptoms of Major Depression

- Sadness, anxiety, or “empty” feelings
- Decreased energy, fatigue, or feeling “slowed down”
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia, oversleeping, or waking much earlier than usual)
- Appetite and weight changes (either loss or gain)
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt, and worthlessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or remembering
- Irritability or excessive crying
- Chronic aches and pains not explained by another physical condition

Treatment

If you are experiencing five or more symptoms of depression, and these symptoms last for two weeks or longer, you should consult a qualified health care or mental health professional who can evaluate your concerns. Bring along a supportive friend if you are anxious or hesitant about the appointment.

Resources for treatment include your student health center or counseling service, the Resident Advisor in your dorm, your family health care provider, a community mental health agency, a hospital psychiatric outpatient department or clinic, a private or nonprofit counseling center, and local hotlines. Several effective treatments are available and can provide relief from symptoms in just a few weeks. The most common are psychotherapy, antidepressant medication, or a combination.

SOURCE: Adapted from National Institute of Mental Health. 1999. *What do these students have in common?* (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/students.cfm>; retrieved August 31, 2000).