

Depression: More Than Sadness

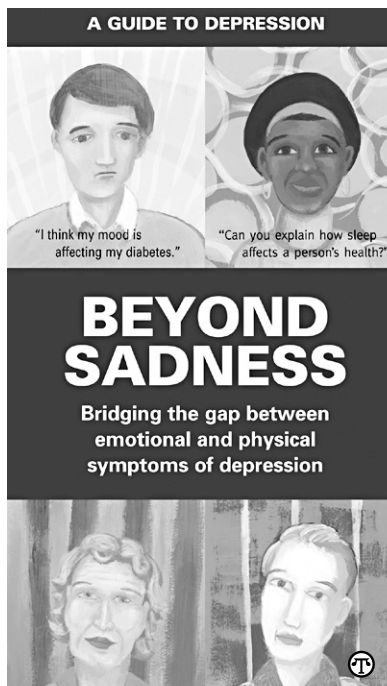
(NAPSA)—If you had headaches, back pain and insomnia, would you think you had depression? Isabelle didn't either, even though she was experiencing several symptoms that often point to underlying depression. What Isabelle didn't know, according to researchers at the University of Michigan Depression Center, is that depression is much more than sadness—physical symptoms are often powerful signs of the illness, too.

“For years I experienced headaches and nausea and I was really exhausted all the time, but every doctor I saw told me I had something different,” said Isabelle, a 37-year-old teacher who had been told she might have migraines and ulcers, as well as numerous flus and colds.

“When a doctor finally diagnosed me with depression after seven years, I was shocked; I didn't think I was that down or sad. But once I learned that depression is a real illness that is caused by natural chemicals in my brain and body, I was relieved that what I was suffering had a name and effective treatment.”

One reason people may not know they have depression is that the focus has always been on emotional symptoms rather than physical ones. Surprisingly, some of the most common signs of depression are headaches, digestive problems and back pain. Both doctors and patients tend to pay attention to physical ailments like these, but generally fail to link them to depression.

The chemical messengers serotonin and norepinephrine each play a role in depression. They



This free brochure that helps you talk to your doctor about depression is available if you call 1-800-475-MICH (6424) or e-mail depression@umich.edu.

also act together to send messages about physical pain perception. Full recovery from depression is more likely to occur when both the physical and emotional symptoms are treated—something most current treatments don't do.

Open communication in the doctor's office is key to resolving all of depression's symptoms. “Up to 80 percent of patients with depression visit their primary care physician first, often complaining of unexplained body aches and tiredness,” said John Greden, MD,

executive director of the Depression Center. “The problem is that most people don't give their health care providers the full story, so depression is often missed.”

Although it is the physician who makes the diagnosis, you need to tell the doctor all of your physical and emotional symptoms. If you feel rushed or forgetful, make a list of your ailments to bring with you to the visit. If you feel hesitant or uncomfortable, some conversation starters may be: “I just don't feel like myself lately”; “My family has commented on a change in my attitude”; or “My stomach is upset constantly even though I haven't changed my diet.”

Ask yourself whether you often experience:

- Headache
- Digestive problems
- Backache
- Joint/muscle pains
- Dizziness
- Loss of interest
- Sadness or tearfulness
- Low energy
- Change in sleep patterns

What is Isabelle's advice to people with unexplained aches and pains? “If your painful physical symptoms persist, you should consider asking your doctor if you might be suffering from depression,” she says. “Depression is not your fault, so don't let that stop you from speaking up.”

For more information on the physical symptoms of depression and tips on how to talk to your health care provider, get a free brochure by calling 1-800-475-MICH (6424) or logging on to www.med.umich.edu/depression.