

When It's Not Just the Blues

(NAPSA)—Everyone feels down or sad at some point in his or her life, but sometimes it's more than just the blues.

"Sadness is a feeling. Depression is an illness that needs treatment," says Jonathan Alpert, Ph.D., M.D., assistant professor, Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital. "It is natural to feel sad after a serious life event like a breakup, unemployment or bereavement. It becomes a serious problem when feelings of sadness become persistent and when depression extends to other areas such as sleep, appetite, and energy levels."

If you're feeling blue or depressed, you're not alone. More than eighteen million Americans are diagnosed with depression every year, and some researchers believe another eighteen million go untreated.

Persistent feelings of sadness, lack of enjoyment of normal activities and lack of focus are signs you may be depressed and it's important to seek treatment.

What to do?

Many people turn to prescription medications as a first line treatment, but for as many as 50 percent of people with depression, this option does not work.

"Many people can't tolerate the side effects of antidepressants, become discouraged and stop altogether. For other people, side effects are not the problem but simply that the antidepressants they are taking fail to relieve their depression," says Dr. Alpert.

A new study conducted by Dr. Alpert at Massachusetts General Hospital involved patients who did not respond or only partially responded to a single antidepressant, and tested combination therapy to see if it would improve patient response. The study combined the dietary supplement S-

Are you depressed?

Try this short quiz. Put a check mark next to the sign that sounds like you:

- I am really sad most of the time.
- I don't enjoy doing the things I've always enjoyed doing.
- I am always tired. I find it hard to get out of bed.
- I don't feel like eating much or I feel like eating all the time.
- I have lots of aches and pains that don't go away.

Source: National Institute of Mental Health, www.nimh.nih.gov

If you checked several boxes, call your doctor and take this list with you.

Your doctor can work with you to develop a treatment program.



adenosylmethionine, better known as SAM-e (pronounced "sammy"), with the patients' current medications. Although the study investigators caution this was a pilot study with several limitations, the results suggest the combination may be as effective as two antidepressants with fewer side effects. The authors also suggest additional research is warranted.

SAM-e is a natural compound produced by the body and is sold as a dietary supplement in the United States under the Food and Drug Administration's Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994.

A government-funded trial is currently under way to confirm the promising results. In the meantime, seek help and talk to your doctor about treatment options.

To learn more about SAM-e, visit www.sam-e.com. To be considered for enrollment in future Massachusetts General Hospital studies, visit www.massgeneral.org.