



DYSTHYMIA
Information for Patients and Families
Covenant Health
Mental Health Program
Grey Nuns Community Hospital & Misericordia Community Hospital

What is Dysthymia?

Dysthymia is a longstanding depressed mood that is present for most, if not all of the day, for more days than not, lasting for at least two years. During periods of depressed mood some or all of the following symptoms may be present:

- ◆ Poor appetite or overeating
- ◆ Oversleeping or poor sleeping
- ◆ Low self esteem
- ◆ Low energy or fatigue
- ◆ Poor concentration
- ◆ Difficulty making decisions
- ◆ Feelings of hopelessness

Many people also experience little interest or pleasure in anything. Some people become self-critical and see themselves as incapable. Symptoms can become a part of day to day life with depression free intervals that last no longer than two months.

Additionally, people suffering from Dysthymia may find themselves brooding about the past, withdrawing from usual social contacts, as well as experiencing feelings of irritability or excessive anger.

Some people find the combination of social isolation, poor self esteem and pessimism can lead to decreased social skills. People who have been dysthymic may notice a decrease in their productivity.

Six percent of the population has dysthymia. This illness can affect children, adults and the elderly. Women tend to experience this illness more than men.

What causes Dysthymia?

There are many factors that are thought to contribute to Dysthymia. Some of these factors include:

Heredity: Dysthymia is more likely to occur if your first line relatives have been diagnosed with a mood disorder. This factor can be stronger in some families and milder in others. It can also skip several generations and suddenly reappear.

Physical Factors: Anything that can affect brain functioning can contribute to Dysthymia. This could range from injury at birth, head injury or severe viral illness. Some medications can induce depressive states. The abuse of alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, speed or other drugs can also induce Dysthymia. Some physical illness may also contribute to this mood disorder, so it is important to have a complete check up.

Psychological Factors: These factors can include serious and upsetting life events. Also poor quality relationships and unhealthy lifestyles can be significant psychological factors. A person's personality and thinking style can be contributing factors.

How is Dysthymia treated?

It is important to have a complete physical examination to rule out other physical diseases that can contribute to Dysthymia

Your doctor may suggest one or more of the following:

- ◆ A complete physical examination

- ◆ Blood tests or other investigations
- ◆ Medications
- ◆ Psychotherapy (talk therapy)
- ◆ Group Therapy
- ◆ ECT (Electroconvulsive Therapy)

What can someone with Dysthymia do?

- ◆ See your Doctor. Discuss the need for a physical exam and investigations. This may rule out other illnesses that can cause Dysthymia, such as thyroid disease.
- ◆ There are a number of medications available for the treatment of dysthymia. Your doctor may choose one based on your symptoms so it is important to be honest with your doctor. The medications take a few weeks to take effect and the full effect of a medication may not be noticed for several weeks so, it is **very important** to keep taking medication as prescribed. Some medications cause side effects. Keep your doctor informed. You can get information on specific medications through your nurse, doctor or pharmacist.
- ◆ Engaging in individual or group psychotherapy (talk therapy) can have enormous benefit on a person's sense of well being. In talk therapy psychological factors can be addressed and resolved. Many people find talk therapy helps them to feel more confident and more able to make positive lifestyle changes. Most research shows that the combination of medication and psychotherapy as being the best treatment for Dysthymia.

Take good care of yourself. If you are not sleeping well find out what you can do to develop healthier sleep hygiene. Eat properly, you can use the Canada Food Guide as a reference. Plan exercise as a part of your week. Make contact with people who can be a positive influence in your life. Have some structure in your everyday routine. Contribute to something positive in some way, i.e. a kind gesture. It can enhance self esteem.

- ◆ Join a support group.
- ◆ Avoid alcohol and street drugs.
- ◆ Ask your Doctor about talk therapy
- ◆ Have structure in your day, most people do better when they are engaged in a variety of activities.

There is a risk of suicide when a person is diagnosed with Dysthymia. If you or someone else is suicidal, get help **right away**.

You can:

- ◆ Call your doctor
- ◆ Call Health Link at 780 408-5465
- ◆ Go to the **EMERGENCY** department at your nearest hospital

If someone you care about has Dysthymia

- ◆ Listen - offer support
- ◆ Do not take his or her illness personally
- ◆ Do not criticize the person
- ◆ Ask them what you can do to help
- ◆ Find out what resources are available in your Community
- ◆ Look after your own needs while being supportive to someone who is dysthymic.
- ◆ Remember that a depressive illness can be stressful for family and friends. Feelings of anger and irritability can occur. Sometimes it is necessary to talk about these feelings with someone.
- ◆ Try to keep a balanced perspective

Where can you get more information?

- ask your doctor or nurse
- call Health Link - 408-5465

This information was produced by the Patient Education Committee in the Mental Health Program, Covenant Health in January 2009. Permission is given to photocopy as is. Reorder Form # 90282