Spinal Cord Injury Emotional Adjustment and Depression

What is Depression?
Depression is a serious medical disorder and is not just "feeling blue" or "down in the dumps.” It is closely linked to your thoughts, feelings, physical health and daily activities. Depression affects men and women and can cause some or all of the following physical and psychological symptoms:

- Changes in sleep (too much or too little)
- Feeling down or hopeless
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Changes in appetite
- Diminished energy or activity
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Feelings of worthlessness or self-blame
- Thoughts of death or suicide

After a spinal cord injury, periods of sadness are normal. However, there is concern when you feel depressed or lose interest in usual activities and these feelings last for more than 2 weeks. Depression is not caused by personal weakness, laziness or lack of will power.

Causes of Depression
The cause of depression is not known for sure, however, it is known that life stresses and medical problems can cause a chemical imbalance in the brain and that has been linked to changes in mood, enjoyment, sleep, energy, appetite and ability to concentrate.

Depression Treatment
A combination of counseling and antidepressants has been found to produce the best results in treating depression. Regular exercise or physical activity can improve mood especially in conjunction with counseling and medications.

Depression should be treated because it can have harmful effects on your ability to function. It can make pain worse, sleep difficult, take away your energy and enjoyment and make it hard for you to take care of your own health. Untreated depression can last 6 months or more. Thoughts of death are a symptom of depression and suicide risk is higher when someone is depressed. The combination of brain chemistry and thoughts make it difficult for someone with depression and suicidal thoughts to find a way out of their problems. Once depression is treated, the suicidal thoughts go away.

What is Counseling
There are many types of therapy but cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has been proven to help depression. There are improvements in depression when people are more engaged in meaningful activities and they re-gain positive beliefs and attitudes.
about themselves, their world and their future. The therapist works with you to find activities that are meaningful and enjoyable.

**How do Antidepressants Work?**
Antidepressants work by restoring a normal balance of chemicals in the brain. When these chemicals are rebalanced, it leads to feeling better physically and emotionally. Treating depression can help you function better in all areas of your life. Antidepressants are not addictive and some people do get side effects but they tend to lessen over time.

**Depression Self-Test**
For each of the 9 items below, over the past 2 weeks, give yourself a 0 if you have not been bothered at all, 1 if several days, 2 if more than half the days and 3 if nearly every day.

- ____ Little interest or no pleasure in doing things.
- ____ Feeling down, depressed or hopeless.
- ____ Trouble falling or staying asleep or sleeping too much.
- ____ Feeling tired or having little energy.
- ____ Poor appetite or over-eating.
- ____ Feeling bad about yourself or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down.
- ____ Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television.
- ____ Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed or the opposite: being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual.
- ____ Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way.

**Total: ______**

Answer all of the questions honestly. If your score is 10 or higher and you have been feeling this way for more than a week or two, contact your health care provider or a psychologist, psychiatrist or counselor who has experience treating depression. If you are having thoughts of death or suicide, contact your health care provider or mental health specialist immediately. Also, inform those around you how badly you are feeling so they can support you and help keep you safe during this difficult time.

If you are in danger of harming yourself now, please call 911, the 24-hour National Crisis Hotline at 800-273-8255 or your local crisis clinic right away. In Onondaga County you can call the Contact Hotline at (315) 251-0600.