

Q & A Mindline



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Q I have suffered three episodes of depression in the last eight years. Although I have been well for nearly four years now, I fear experiencing another episode. Therefore, I have continued my medication to date. Please advise.

You seem to have experienced recurrent clinical depression. This is a common mental health problem, suffered by nearly 36 per cent of the Indian population in their life time. Did you know depression is the third commonest medical illness in the world after cancer and heart disease? It will become a number one condition by 2030. So, be informed that you are not alone and most importantly, it's a treatable condition.

There is no hard and fast rule for the medication duration. Treatment depends on nature, degree and number of depressive episodes. And usually for those with two or more episodes of depression, it is advisable to take the medicine between 12-24 months. After this, if individuals remain symptom-free for that duration, then tapering down

the dose and even stopping medication can be considered.

In all cases, individuals should receive a minimal required dose during the maintenance phase and the need for medication should be reviewed regularly. An effort must be made to wean off medication following risk benefit analysis at clinical consultation.

While an antidepressant offers protection against reoccurrence of depression, it does not guarantee it. Some people experience recurrent episodes of depression despite treatment with antidepressants. Depression is multi-factorial so it is important to evaluate and work around the ongoing trigger/cause of depression with general counselling or specialized psychotherapy. Lifestyle changes play a key in keeping people well, especially exercise and fitness. I recall a signboard in my gym with the quote, "You are one exercise session away from a better mood!" So, I think exercise is the most effective antidepressant.

In your case, I see no reason why you can't give up the tablets gradually. One sure way of knowing whether tablets are needed or not, is by stopping them under specialist supervision. Best wishes!

Q I drink regularly and my wife hates me for it. I admit to an inability to stop and on many occasions I have gotten drunk and embarrassed myself. I am riddled by guilt and hate being ridiculed often. Do you think I am addicted and is it my fault?

The problem of addiction is better addressed with scientific advances and discoveries about the functioning of the brain. The new discoveries have

enabled us to alter the views toward addiction and respond effectively to the problem.

Take note that addiction is a complex problem. Scientific research has argued that addiction is a brain disease with complicated interplay of individual's behaviour with factors such as genetic makeup, age of exposure to substance(s), environmental influences (including stress from work, relationship and social milieu). Addiction affects multiple brain circuits, including those involved in reward and motivation, learning and memory and inhibitory control.

While the path to addiction begins with the act of taking a substance or alcohol, but overtime a person's ability to choose not to do so, is compromised. Thereafter, seeking and consuming it becomes compulsive. This behaviour results largely from the effects of prolonged exposure (of substance or alcohol) on the brain. Although pleasure and enjoyment may have been initially sought, but overtime it will be needed to feel normal or reduce unpleasant feelings/emotions.

I think the guilt you experience is the manifest feeling of personal failing to accept the problem, taking corrective measures and of letting down your family. You must blame yourself only if you failed to try effecting change or seeking help to do so. I think it's better to have tried and failed than to not have tried at all. Guilt is a heavy emotion, therefore to rid yourself of it, try doing the other thing.

The realization that there is a problem is the first step to recovery. I think it's important that you seek professional support and enjoy good health and quality of life you deserve.

Ask your queries at bpositiveQA@apollolife.com