

Q & A Mindline



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Q I'm a 30-year-old woman and off late I've been feeling very low and moody. Are these silent signs of depression?

People tend to think that moodiness or sadness—a continuous down, dragging feeling day after day is a sign of depression. But depression manifests itself as something else entirely—like aches, pains, impaired concentration or memory lapses. They can mask depression—and delay a vital diagnosis and treatments important for early recovery. It's essential to understand cardinal differences between depressed mood and clinical depression.

Depressed mood is an emotion or feeling that we all experience. When a person is stressed, sadness, emptiness or loneliness becomes a part of being human. But one still continues to function normally and gets out of it spontaneously.

Clinical depression is a condition that goes beyond life's ordinary ups and downs. The individual struggles to get out of the depressed phase and the feelings of sadness still linger. There is loss of interest in enjoyable activities, extreme fatigue despite engaging in little or no activity,

sleeplessness, loss of appetite and poor concentration. Additionally, there can be worthlessness with negative feelings and suicidal tendencies. Importantly, depression interferes with work, socialising and recreation.

If the above features have been present for two weeks, it's advisable to seek professional consultation, for early diagnosis & timely treatment. While mild clinical depression responds well to counselling or formal psychotherapy, for severe/significant episodes, a combination of psychotherapy and medicine would be ideal. Research has established that medication and psychotherapies together is more effective than single treatments.

Today millions suffer from depression silently and majority of them don't seek professional help unless their condition worsens affecting their daily life.

Q Do anti-depressants have side-effects? If yes, how severe are they?

All prescribed medication including antidepressants can have side effects. Many of these are dose-dependent, or when there is cross interaction with other tablets.

In the UK and other western countries, all medicines come with small folded leaflets with details about the medication, list of side effects and cautions. But in India, very few medicines come with these leaflets.

Side effects of antidepressants depend on nature and category. For example, SSRI can commonly cause nausea, gastritis, bloating sensation, insomnia and headache or at higher dose can cause sexual dysfunction amongst others. With other types, one may experience drowsiness, which for some may come in handy if there is marked sleep disturbance.

It's crucial to be aware of the name, nature and purpose of medicines prescribed, with a detailed explanation of short and long term side effects. You should ask for information leaflets or relevant URL links for detailed information about the medicines. You may consider Google for help, but be careful in believing chat forums where the information can be misinformed.

In most cases, the medication must be prescribed following a risk-benefit analysis. A prescriber would go through options of treating an ailment with medication and considering benefits that would usually outweigh risks. The process must fully engage the patient and their family in decision making.

Q Does everyone go through a mid-life crisis and why?

Well, by definition, mid-life crisis is a transitional period, typically seen between 45 – 65 yrs of age when the identity or confidence can be shaken. It occurs with events that highlight a person's growing age and the awareness of possible shortcomings of accomplishments in life. People experience emotional disturbances including guilt, remorse, anxiety and depression, desire to achieve youthfulness, or make drastic changes to their current lifestyle.

Mid-life crisis is not a phase that most adults go through, but individual personality type and a history of psychological issues might predispose people to this "traditional" mid-life crisis.

I see a mid-life crisis as a phase of realisation that life is finite and we are mortals. It's a wakeup call and an opportunity for acting upon pending aspirations in a thoughtful and definitive manner. It can be part of acceptance or time for a change from the mundane routine. Change is always good albeit in the aftermath of a crisis! 