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## **Depression; a Misunderstood Disease**

*By Stephanie Mallet*

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## **About the Author**

Stephanie Mallet was surprised by the terrible effect that depression had on a close friend and, especially, the consequences for that friend's family as they tried to cope without proper support.

She says that many people just joke about depression but it is too serious for that.

She realized that she could write a simple, straight-forward guide that would help to prepare those people that suffered from the disease.

But, she wanted to ensure that her book will also help their families and close friends to cope with the situation and show them how to ensure that the patient gets the best care and advice.

Stephanie knows many people that have regained control of their lives after serious bouts of depression and, while there is no guaranteed cure, she hopes that her book will help to show many patients that they have a good chance to do the same.



**Part-I: Introduction****1. Unipolar Depression - An Overview**

Unipolar depression is a severe form of depression that is the same as clinical depression or major-depressive disorder. It is a serious illness and may have severe disabling effects.

Unipolar depression affects more than ten million Americans every year. It ranks among the leading causes for disability in America.

It affects women more severely than men.

Unipolar depression is a psychiatric disorder that makes you disinterested in your normal activities. You are always in a low mood and do not find happiness in anything.

It affects normal routine functions like eating and sleeping.

It is a chronic and recurring illness; most people with unipolar depression suffer more than one episode in their life.

This depression occurs across all age groups and is not confined to any particular group or socio-economic background.

Unipolar depression can occur anytime. It may be a one-time occurrence and you may recover completely after treatment.

Or, it could recur soon after treatment.

This depression may set in gradually or suddenly. Unipolar depression could be a factor in some suicides.

The incidence of this depression is high between the ages of 25 and 44. Depression episodes may last for six to nine months.

Sometimes, depression goes away by itself without the sufferer undergoing any specific treatment. This is probably due to the

body's own tendency to correct irregularities and return to normal status.

Unipolar depression may be brewing within you for quite some time before symptoms show themselves clearly. Small disappointments and problems could compound their effects into severe depression.

Some people may develop it through no action of their own.

Sometimes, it could occur due to trauma or severe shock.

Common symptoms of unipolar depression include:

- A lack of interest in the simple pleasures of life.
- You become irritable and are always sad.
- You have drastic changes in your eating and sleeping habits.
- You lose your appetite and do not like any kind of food.
- You cannot sleep and are constantly tense.
- You are unable to concentrate or think clearly.
- You feel as if you are worthless and hopeless.
- You feel guilty for no particular reason.

These intense feelings may translate into severe headaches and other chronic pain, which may not easily respond to any form of treatment.

People suffering from unipolar depression may experience some or all of these symptoms. If these symptoms linger for more than a fortnight, you should seek medical treatment.

There are some different treatment options for unipolar depression. The one that your doctor advises will depend on the intensity of the problem and your suitability for any specific treatment plan.

Common treatment options include:

- antidepressant medications
- cognitive therapy
- psychotherapy
- electroconvulsive therapy, and
- other lifestyle changes like changing diet patterns, quitting smoking and making exercise a regular part of your daily life.

The treatment options may help you to overcome your depression and return to being your normal self after some time.

Different treatment options might be used in isolation or in combination depending on your doctor's diagnosis of your particular circumstances.

Family support can also work wonders in improving the outcome.

Many scientists believe that stress and genetics play a major role in unipolar depression. Although stress could be a major factor for causing this depression, genetic factors may also play a significant role.

Therefore, treatment therapies should be designed to take account of these factors.

Most antidepressant medications require six to twelve weeks to take full effect. These medications are intended to correct imbalances in the feel-good hormones like dopamine, serotonin and epinephrine.

Most antidepressants may have their own side effects. Families of patients should be careful during the early stages of treatment through medications.

Often, you may regain most of your energy levels although your mood is still not fully normal. This could induce you to take unwise actions.

### ***Treatment options***

Psychotherapy, interpersonal therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy and electroconvulsive therapy are treatment options for unipolar depression.

Psychotherapy can prove effective in cases of mild depression. For treating severe depression, a combination of therapy and medications may work the best.

Electroconvulsive therapy is a treatment option that may be considered if other treatment options and medications do not yield desired results.

## Part-II: Understanding Unipolar Depression

### 2. What Is Unipolar Depression?

Unipolar depression is a form of severe depression. It is also known as 'major depressive disorder'.

It is a major illness affecting more than ten to fifteen million Americans and a leading cause for disability, not only in the United States but also across other developed countries.

Unipolar depression can affect people across all ages and any social or economic background.

Normally, half of the people experiencing depression could continue to have frequent, very debilitating episodes, sometimes once or twice a year.

#### *Symptoms*

Unipolar depression has many symptoms. Prominent among them are:

- obvious changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- fatigue
- loss of interest in normal activities that you usually have enjoyed
- a persistent feeling of being useless and worthless
- inability to concentrate or take appropriate decisions, and
- a recurring desire to end your life.

Improper sleep and eating patterns may be mainly responsible for changes in weight and your overall feeling of fatigue. You could lose excessive weight or put on lot of weight.

You also experience physical symptoms like headaches, stomach aches, and frequently lack energy to do anything.

These physical symptoms restrict your ability and desire to do anything. This makes you feel guilty and negative feelings develop.

You feel there is no end to any of these symptoms; that they will continue forever. You feel very pessimistic.

If you experience most of these symptoms for more than fifteen days, you may be suffering from unipolar depression. You should get immediate treatment of your depression problems. Without proper treatment, the symptoms could be aggravated and have serious consequences.

Family and friends can prove to be a major pillar of strength and support during your bouts of depression. They offer comforting advice and help.

However, if you are experiencing severe symptoms of unipolar depression, you may not take their advice or pay heed to their words. You would continue to deny all their efforts.

But, efforts by your family and friends would not go to waste. Persistent efforts may help to bring positive changes.

### 3. Causes of Unipolar Depression

There is no single defined and attributable cause for unipolar depression. A combination of various physical, psychological, environmental, and social causes usually leads to unipolar depression. Earlier, unipolar depression was thought to be mainly due to emotional upsets. However, it is not so.

Sometimes, it could be genetic and many generations of your family would experience symptoms of unipolar depression.

However, it is also common for a person without any family history of depression to experience serious symptoms of unipolar depression.

#### **Common Possible Causes for Unipolar Depression**

**Stress:** Physical and mental stress are important contributors to unipolar depression. Stress could be the main force causing depression in the early stages. Later, symptoms compound due to other associated factors like temperament, physical ailments and your genetic make-up.

**Trauma or Accident:** Serious traumatic events, like loss of a beloved, parents, or close relatives and friends could cause unipolar depression. Serious physical accidents could cause you to go into a state of severe shock and cause depression. Childhood traumas remain imprinted in the mind and could cause depression if something similar happens in later life.

Other factors that might trigger depression could be loss of a job, change in surroundings like shifting to a new place or contracting a serious illness.

**Genetics:** Sometimes unipolar depression is due to hereditary factors. If depression runs in your family, you could fall victim to it if you have to face serious problems or disappointments.

However, there is insufficient scientific evidence to prove such hereditary factors are the most significant causes for unipolar depression.

**Physical factors:** Insufficient nutrition and lack of necessary vitamins and minerals in your diet cannot satisfy the requirements of your body. This could cause a depressive state of mind that affects your biological functions and lead to unipolar depression.

**Hormonal imbalances:** Drastic changes in hormone levels could lead to a varied range of emotions. You could be overtly alert, hyperactive and sensitive while at other times, you could become subdued and reclusive.

Experiencing such high and low emotional swings could cause unipolar depression.

**Social factors:** Various social causes, like breakup of your family or worrying too much about external social factors such as nuclear families, the gaps between the rich and the poor and many people's monotonous lives may take a toll on your mental health.

You could feel trapped forever into a vicious circle of work and home, with no time or energy to experience and enjoy natural beauty.

This might lead to unipolar depression.

**Medications:** Certain antidepressants, prescription drugs like steroids, stimulants, antibiotics and sedatives may cause serious side effects that sometimes lead to unipolar depression.



You may have to take such medications to combat unrelated illnesses. Some people may be physically capable of dealing with the side effects while others may not be able to and depression sets in.

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