

## Understanding Depression

Depression is one of the most misunderstood challenges that many of us face we face each day. Many of your fellow guardsman and guardswomen have spoken to us about the “blues”, the periods of sadness, and even significant depression that they face in their lives. **You are not alone!** It is a potentially serious problem that is so common place that we often take it for granted.

Although serious depression has been estimated to afflict 1 out of 5 people at some time during their lives, mild mood disturbance seems to affect **all of us**. The term is so readily used that we often do an injustice to those experiencing true depression. How many times have you heard someone in the National Guard saying that they are “so depressed” because their favorite team lost the big game? Yet, we frequently overlook the subtle signs that indicate depression in a loved one or buddy in the guard. Take the following case of someone we recently spoke to through the **National Guard** (names and vital data have been changed).

Mrs. Jones was being interviewed about her husband, a guardsman home from a recent deployment. “I should have realized that something was wrong when I told Robert how excited I was about the U.S. women’s soccer team winning an important game. He turned to me and replied: ‘Yeah. Wouldn’t it be ironic if we achieve world peace but it is too late because we’ve already destroyed our environment?’ This was not like him. Then the next week he quit his part-time job because he was ‘tired of it’ and now he is staying home watching TV.”

This example of how depression can sometimes affect people is not as unusual as it seems. It tends to sneak up, as it did with Robert Jones, first by altering his views. Negative attitudes, both about self and others, are characteristic of those prone to depression. Depression grew until it completely took over Robert’s mood, making everything seem dark and useless. This led to his impulsive decision to quit, one which will later be regretted because depression has altered Robert’s judgment as well. If left unchecked, this could lead to marital problems, drug or alcohol abuse, and even **thoughts of suicide**.

There are several different varieties of depression. Some people experience mood swings that include “highs” as well as the more common “lows”. Other people have a less obvious form of depression, characterized by **“chronic blues”** that don’t vary greatly between highs or toward more noticeable lows. Yet this variety of depression can considerably detract from one’s quality of life, sometimes leading to “major depressive episodes”. Major depression can include any of a number of biological or psychological symptoms and can be so impairing that normal functioning, either at home or at work, becomes impossible. It can affect many of your buddies in the Guard.

American business has long felt the consequences of depression at the workplace. According to a Gallup poll, managers report that an average of 13% of their employees suffer from depression. They further report that 36% have difficulty concentrating, 35% experience sleep problems, 27% report loss of energy, and 18% have a loss of interest in work. In combination with stress and anxiety, many managers felt that depression contributed to decreased production, lower morale, higher absenteeism, and increased drug and alcohol abuse. The combined costs associated with time lost from work and expenses to treat depression have been estimated in excess of \$16 billion per year.

**The good news is that depression is a very treatable issue.** Because there are significant psychological as well as biological aspects to depression, the best approach often is to combine “talk therapy” or counseling with medication. **For many people, however, medication is not necessary.** With either approach, you can experience relief in just a few weeks.

### **Common Symptoms of Depression**

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- Feelings of emptiness or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that you once enjoyed, including sex
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- Thoughts of death or suicide, suicide attempts
- Restlessness, irritability
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain

You may be someone who has taken a particular medication for a long period of time. It may be worthwhile to have a second opinion and to determine if you are on the best course of action to treat your current mood issues. **And if you see a Buddy in the National Guard who seems sad and blue, reach out and ask him or her if they want to talk....or give them our number and remind them that it is free, confidential and private.**

For further assistance, or to schedule a second opinion, our counselors and coaches are available to speak with you privately, confidentially and at no charge as part **Guard Your Buddy**. We can be reached 24/7 at **855 HELP GYB (855-435-7492)**. We can

help determine if you are suffering from a true depression or a normal variation in mood, and we will assist you in finding the best course of action to change the situation. Take some action today....don't let a **blue mood** turn into a **serious depression**.

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