Depression: Do YOU, as the caregiver, ever feel depressed?

There are times we all may experience temporary feelings that resemble depression. But, it is important to distinguish between temporary anxieties and clinical depression. Clinical depression is a serious illness that involves disturbances in one's mood, concentration, sleep, activity levels, interest, appetite, and social behavior.

What are the signs of clinical depression?

Physical signs may include:

- Significant changes in appetite and sleep patterns (insomnia, sleeping more than usual, etc.)
- Fatigue, lack of energy, physical aches and pains that have no medical basis

Mental (changes in thought) may include:

- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, and/or worthlessness
- Inability to concentrate, forgetfulness, indecisiveness, and/or even thoughts of death or suicide

Emotional signs may include:

- Decreased feelings of pleasure or enjoyment
- Increased feelings of sadness and anxiety, crying for no apparent reason, and/or indifference to others
- For moms after recent births, postpartum depression may occur. Changes in hormonal levels may affect a woman's mood. Usually it occurs within the first three months after delivery.

Changes in Behavior often include:

- Agitation and/or restlessness
- Neglect of your personal appearance and hygiene
- Avoidance of home or patient responsibilities
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs

It is extremely important to recognize any of the above signs or symptoms of depression. Three positive actions that you may take are:

1. Utilize your Mended Hearts or Mended *Little* Hearts Group for support.
2. Participate in community or religious activities that will help you achieve and maintain a more optimistic outlook.
3. Adopt a healthy diet and exercise plan.

Your best health plan is to be proactive and quickly deescalate any feelings of depression. However, if your lifestyle changes do not provide you the expected results, please seek professional guidance. This will lessen the impact of depression and restore your ability to be a happier healthier caregiver.

The important message for all of our caregivers is that taking good care of yourself will also result in taking good care of your heart patient. **It is a winning plan for both the caregiver and the heart patient.**

For more information, go to www.mendedhearts.org or call 1-888-HEART-99.

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