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What causes depression?

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Biology vs. Environment

Just like any other mood disorder, depression is a complex issue that involves both biological and environmental factors. Some of us are born with a predisposition to depression, while others end up feeling depressed after a bad experience.

Thanks to the efforts made by modern medicine and psychology, nowadays depression is highly treatable. Leaving aside isolated cases, which may require drug therapy, psychotherapeutic techniques may be enough for most people. However, before we arrive there, it is important to understand the roots of depression.



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Genes, Neurons and Chemicals

The human brain is like a command center. It oversees and controls everything, from organ functioning and movement, to complex emotions and beliefs. This incredible balance between mind and body is orchestrated by millions of neurons and all sorts of substances, such as neurotransmitters and hormones. Even a tiny imbalance in brain chemistry can easily affect how you perceive the world.

The Role of Serotonin

When it comes to biological factors for depression, it is commonly accepted that serotonin plays a crucial role. In the brain, this neurotransmitter acts as a relay, transporting messages from one area to another.

Given this critical task, an imbalance in serotonin levels may influence our emotions. Since depression is often characterized by negative emotions, the link between this mood disorder and serotonin is obvious.

Happiness Hormones

Other chemicals that play a crucial role in mood disorders are dopamine and endorphins. Popularly known as “the happiness hormones”, these two substances are usually released during and after a pleasant event, such as spending time with your loved ones, eating your favorite food, watching sports, or playing a game you enjoy.

Low levels of dopamine are often associated with depression. This is the reason why people who experience this mood disorder find it difficult to enjoy things that were once entertaining.

Restoring the Balance

As for treatment options, note that the relationship between mind and brain is a “two-way street”. Changes in brain chemistry can alter the state of your mind and vice versa. That’s why some therapeutic techniques (e.g. meditation, relaxation, mindfulness) can reset the balance between body and mind.

Life’s Unexpected Turns

Albert Ellis, the founder of Rational-Emotive Therapy, once said, “There are three musts that hold us back: I must do well. You must treat me well. And the world must be easy.”

On many occasions, people may find themselves experiencing negativity, because the world is not according to their expectations. We have to remember that as human beings, it is natural for us to want to maintain total control over our lives, at all times.

In the Face of Obstacles

So what happens when life throws us a curveball? We get angry, upset and disappointed. “What did I do to deserve this?”

“Life is too cruel”

“I hate my life”

These are some of the things we may tell ourselves after a least pleasant event. But life is just

life. We cannot foresee every possible scenario and we definitely can't blame other people and circumstances for how we feel.

You Perception Counts Most

From a strictly biological and medical standpoint, being "healthy as a horse" doesn't guarantee that you'll never experience depression.

People get sick, lose their jobs, break up with loved ones, etc. There are countless events that may be interpreted as unbearable and catastrophic. Perhaps you weren't lucky enough to grow up in a loving, healthy environment, or maybe your colleagues never liked you that much.

Whatever the circumstances may be, remember that it is your interpretation and way of handling the situation that counts, not what objectively happens.

Learning to Cope with Depression

In fact, therapists don't "cure" depression because they cannot erase the bad memories or past experiences associated with your condition. The best strategy is teaching people how to manage their mental state so that depression (even if it "seeps" in) won't be able to take over your life as easily.

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