

HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

Are you always walking around in a fog? Depression might be the culprit

SOME MORNINGS I wake to find a cloudy marine layer blanketing Los Angeles. For the last two weeks, I have felt like those mornings: dreary and foggy. The worst part is that I don't want to work out. The reason: I'm depressed. And I'm not alone. By the year 2020, depressive illness is projected to be the second leading cause of disability worldwide. Though depression tends to be more prevalent among women, men suffer, too — an estimated 6 million annually, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

Depression is notoriously difficult for primary-care physicians to diagnose. A recent review of the research on depression, published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, revealed that primary-care physicians fail to recognize depression in 30%–50% of patients because its physical symptoms (like fatigue, headache and significant weight loss or gain) resemble the symptoms of other ailments. If you're trying to decide whether a flu bug has bitten you or a rain cloud's hovering overhead, ask yourself the following questions:

- » Over the past two weeks, have I felt down, depressed or hopeless?
- » Have I felt little interest in or pleasure from doing things?

If you answered yes to either of these questions, look for signs of weight gain or loss, an increase or decrease in appetite, disturbed sleep, noticeable agitation, loss of energy, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, suicidal thoughts or



Find Out More

For more information on depression, consult the following organizations:

» **DEPRESSION AND BIPOLAR SUPPORT ALLIANCE**
(800) 826-3632; www.dbsalliance.org

» **NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR THE MENTALLY ILL**
(800) 950-NAMI; www.nami.org

» **NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR DEPRESSIVE ILLNESS, INC.**
(800) 239-1265; www.depression.org

» **NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION**
(800) 969-NMHA; www.nmha.org

diminished ability to concentrate or make decisions. If any of these symptoms impairs your relationships or your ability to function, it's time to get rid of the haze in your life.

The most common way to treat depression is through psychotherapy and medication. Talk therapy offers a forum in which to discuss feelings, ask for help or seek treatment, which is important for men, many of whom tend to “self-medicate” with drugs and alcohol. Some men even compulsively throw themselves into work or hobbies to hide their depression.

Fortunately, one such “hobby” actually has a positive effect. Physical activity is

gaining popularity in clinical situations as an effective intervention for mental-health problems. According to a study in the *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, a causal link exists between exercise and a decrease in the occurrence of depression. While there's some question whether exercise effectively treats depression among the general population, heading to the gym might lighten the psychological load the condition adds to your life. But when your feel-good workout becomes a source of anxiety or doesn't help clear the haze, it's time to discuss more options, like medication, with your physician. **M&F**