

DEPRESSION MYTHS

In spite of the overwhelming evidence that depression is a worldwide, highly debilitating and relatively common condition, there continues to be a social stigma about mental illness in general and some particular stigma about depression.

These types of shaming societal beliefs can create barriers for people to access appropriate professional and non-professional support.

Problematic and Stigmatizing Beliefs about Depression

Depression is something you can snap out of.

- **False.** Depression is not about will power. In fact, most people struggling with depression feel very frustrated and resigned because they have often been trying so hard to will their way out of the experience.

Depressed people are just feeling sorry for themselves and are trying to get attention.

- **False.** While it is true that less commonly some people may make up symptoms or feign a sense of despair, most people who are depressed genuinely feel quite terrible. These are not made-up feelings. Also, consider the trade-off of this kind of “deal”—the pain and suffering is overwhelming for some minor interactive attention. The trade-off is certainly not in the depressed person’s favour.

Depression only happens to some people.

- **False.** While this doesn’t mean that everyone inevitably becomes depressed, it means that none of us are invulnerable. With particular events, living and social conditions, losses or hurts coming together, any one of us could develop depression at some point in life.

People who are depressed are, in fact, just lazy.

- **False.** Depression has profound impacts on a person’s physical energy, mood and motivation. They feel stuck and motivation is very difficult to come by. Saying that someone is lazy when they have depression is like saying that someone with the flu and a fever is lazy.

People who are depressed need medications.

- **Sometimes** medications can be a very helpful part of treatment of depression. However, not everyone who is depressed necessarily requires such medications. In many cases, depression is effectively treated without antidepressant medications through psychotherapy and other modes of social support. Usually medications by themselves without any other support are not an ideal treatment plan.

Depression is just a chemical imbalance.

- **Yes and no.** We know that the brain chemistry of someone who is clinically depressed looks different from a non-depressed person; however whether the depression caused the chemical changes or other factors in the person's life drive the changes are another matter to consider. It is too narrow to define depression as an exclusively neurological or neurochemical imbalance.