How to Cope With Recurrent Depression

by LANA BARHUM

Coping With Recurrent Depression

Some people experience a single depressive episode and fully recover. For about 50 to 80 percent of people, depression is a chronic illness that will come back, this according to one report in the journal, *Clinical Psychology Review*.

What Is Recurrent Depression?

Depression is a significantly debilitating mental health disorder, affecting 16.1 million American adults in 2015, this according to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). For most people, depression is a one-time occurrence, but a few of us end up facing several relapses of depressive symptoms, a condition known as major recurrent depression.

Recurrent depression is a very severe and challenging type of depression to treat.

A person suffering from recurrent depression may experience the following symptoms:

- Unrealistic anxiety
- Despair and hopelessness
- Chronic fatigue
- Inability to make decisions
- Lack of interest towards life
- Susceptibility to suicidal thoughts

People who suffer from recurrent depression tend to suffer from symptoms that tend to resolve on their own. These people usually feel normal on most days and behave ordinarily for days, weeks or months before showing signs of another depressive episode.

But the depression always returns. Untreated major recurrent depression can result in worsening symptoms and an increased risk of suicide, increasing with each episode, this according to one 2013 report in the journal, *PLoS One*.

What Triggers Recurring Depression?

Why does depression keep rearing its ugly head over and over for some of us? And what can we do to manage triggers and prevent reoccurrences?

Anyone who suffered from depression is susceptible to recurrence. Traumatic life experiences can trigger a recurrent episode of depression.
Painful situations that may cause depressive symptoms to return can include anything from the death of a loved one to a job loss or physical illness. Some people are even pre-deposed to recurring depression.

The reason triggers set off a recurrent episode is because they overwhelm your ability to cope.

For example, one 2014 study in the *Clinical Psychological Science* finds if you have previously suffered from depression, getting a divorce puts you at risk for another episode. The researchers found 60% percent of divorced adults will experience another depressive episode.

Another study from 2016 reported in *The British Journal of Psychiatry* finds frightening events, such as terrorist attack, can trigger a depression recurrence. Even anniversaries of these types of events are triggers.

**Diagnosing Recurrent Depression**

Much like other types of depression, a diagnosis of recurrent depression is made by getting a complete history of traumas, medical health, and family history of mental illness. This usually involves the presence of two or more major depressive episodes, which are at least two consecutive months apart.

Major depressive episodes are characterized by persistent depressed mood and/or loss of interest in most life activities, causing significant impairment in your daily life.

**Managing Triggers and Coping**

There many ways you can cope and manage your depression triggers.

Here are some things they may help:

- **Positive self-talk.** Sometimes, the simple act of telling yourself your feelings are temporary can make a big difference in keeping depressive symptoms at bay. When I feel as if the depression winning, I remind myself what I am feeling will pass and I can’t allow the depressive feelings to take over.

- **Nurture your soul.** It is important to enough and support your mental health. Listening to my favorite music, taking a warm bath, meditating or going for a walk are all ways I cope when things seem overwhelming.

- **Seek out support.** You may want to be alone when your emotions start to take over, but isolating yourself will trigger depression symptoms. Let your loved ones know you are struggling or consider joining a support group to help you reach out to other others who understand what it is like living with depression.

If you think you may be suffering from a depression relapse, reach out to your doctor or therapist. Recurrent depression is common and nothing for you to be ashamed of.

**Recurrent Depression Treatment**

There are three types of treatments available for treating recurrent depression, including:

**Psychotherapy**

Also called talk therapy, psychotherapy involves working with a therapist to work through situations bringing about your depression. There are several different approaches to psychotherapy, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), interpersonal therapy and other kinds of talk therapy.

CBT involves learning to be aware of feelings and triggers and training your brain to handle your responses better. Interpersonal therapy focuses on your relationships and how they affect your life and what you can to minimize or modify the effect some people and circumstances have on your life.

**Antidepressant Medications**
Some studies have reported long-term maintenance therapy may reduce the risk of reoccurrence. It is recommended for patients who suffer from chronic depression to continue treatment for at least six months after symptoms have resolved to reduce the chances of recurrence.

**Electroconvulsive Therapy**

Also called shock therapy, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is the last result in treating recurrent depression. ECT involves delivering electrical stimulation to the brain, causing a seizure.

For reasons researchers are yet to understand, the seizure relieves depressive symptoms without causing any structural brain damage.

Most patients who suffer from recurrent depression are treated with a combination approach of antidepressant medication and talk therapy, which continues until you research a mild state of depression. This is the point where you can go back to performing daily activities and having a regular productive life.

Once you have reached this point in your treatment, your doctor and/or therapist will decide whether you will need additional talk therapy and/or a maintenance dose of antidepressants to prevent a recurrence.

**Outlook**

Regardless of how your depression is treated, recurrent depression requires a long-term commitment to managing triggers and seeking medical and therapist help if symptoms start returns. It is important you don’t stop taking your depression medications without your doctor’s approval.

The outlook when you seek out treatment for recurrent depression is very good. Make sure you work with a therapist if your depression returns so you can regain control of your life.