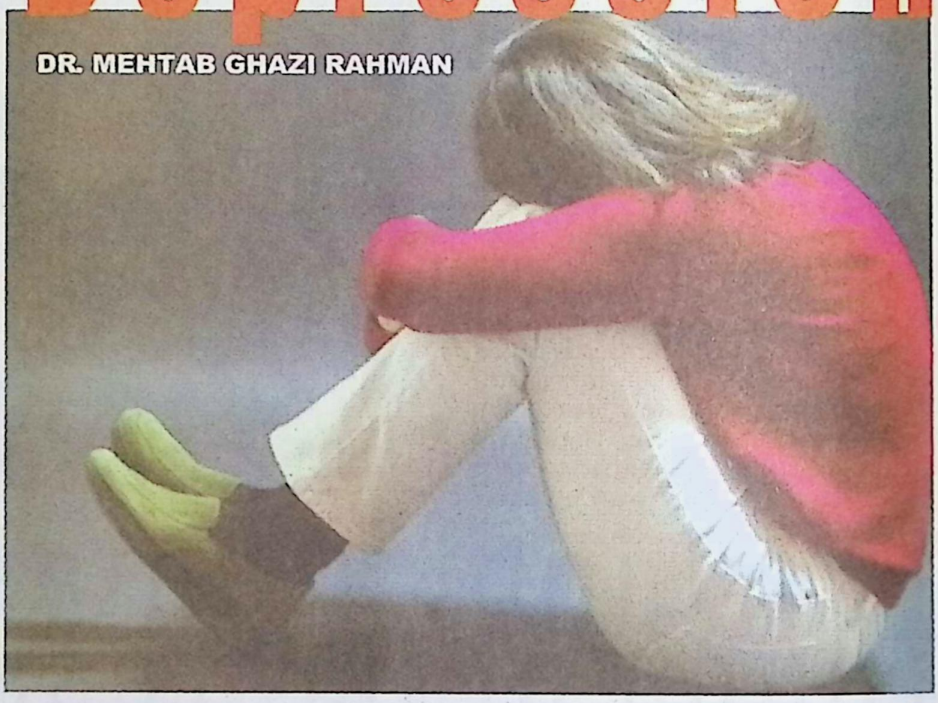
Depression

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It is only human to feel sad, fed up or miserable at times when things are simply not going our way. Normally, these negative feelings only last for a week or two and we soon learn to cope with our failures or losses and carry on with life. Spending time with family or friends and a long chat over a good cup of tea with a close one usually makes us feel a lot better. However, some people find it extremely difficult to cope with their negative feelings, and instead of a week or two, they suffer for very long periods, however hard they try to cope with their emotions. When a person suffers emotionally for long periods so terribly that it starts affecting their lives in a negative way and develop a number of symptoms listed in this article, it could be that the person may be suffering from a medical disorder known as 'depression'.

So what exactly is 'depression'?

The feeling of depression is an extremely unpleasant feeling that lasts a lot longer than the short episodes of sadness that we all experience from time to time. Instead of feeling down and low for days to a maximum of a few weeks, people with depression suffer for months and even years. This is not something they do deliberately one theory suggests that depression is caused by an imbalance of brain chemicals (neurotransmitters) and therefore is a medical problem. A person with depression will have a number of symptoms they will complain about. These include feeling unha, py most of the time (but their mood gets slightly during the evening), loss of interest in life and hobbies, finding it difficult to cope with things at home and office as well as being unable to make simple decisions for themselves, fatigue, loss of appetite and weight, difficulty in going to sleep at night and then unintentionally waking up very early in the mornings. Depression takes a toll on one's relationships too - the illness causes an affected person to lose interest in intimacy and physical relationships with their partners, and their constant complaints about feeling hopeless and useless all the time often leads to communication problems with friends and family. Socially, the depressed person will stop hanging out with friends, feel irritable most of the day and when things get too overbearing, even contemplate suicide! Hence, depression is a very serious 'medical' condition that should never merely be passed off as a disease of the 'emotionally weak'; depression has a scientific basis and people who show signs of depression need to be seen by a qualified doctor in order for them to feel better and carry on with life.

It is interesting to note that a lot of patients with depression never realise they have the condition, as it comes on very gradually. Most people, especially in a country like ours where depression is not a well-recognised condition, decide to struggle on with life without seeking any help, since our cultural perception is that it is a disease that affects only the emotionally weak. This perception cannot be any farther from the truth. In fact, some of the strongest personalities in history, such as Winston Churchill, have suffered from depression during their lives. Some people try to cope with their feelings by immersing themselves into work, thus suppressing their feelings, but this only goes on to make them feel more exhausted and stressed when they deliberately avoid their feelings. These individuals soon develop somatic (bodily) symptoms such as headaches and sleepiness for which a doctor will find no obvious reason. Sometimes, these physical symptoms may be the first sign of depression in a lot of people.

Of course, it is quite natural to feel depressed after a distressing event such as a death in the family, a divorce or after losing one's job, and this certainly does not imply that the person going through this bad patch is bound to suffer from depression. The natural reaction in a normal person would be to feel down for a number of weeks to a maximum of a month or two. The person will ponder about the reason for feeling so low for some time and want to speak to close relatives to help them cope with a misfortune, eventually coming to terms with what has