

Depression

Gleam of hope for the soul

Nearly each fifth German experiences a serious depression in life, i. e. that he/she suffers at least 14 days on depressive phases, loss of drive and/or the incapability to rejoice. Other symptoms add: sleepiness during daytime, sleeping disorders, appetite and sexual disorders, weakness, sense of callousness, only to mention some of them. Number and intensity of the symptoms categorize if it is a minor, medium-heavy or a severe form of depression. If the symptoms repeatedly occur then we call it a recurrent depressive disorder which particularly causes distress. If the symptoms are only minor or slightly distinct then we call it depressive adaptation disorder. Unfortunately only one third of all depressions are diagnosed, only 10% are treated adequately. Sometimes depressions are difficult to identify, e. g. a person with a personality disorder or a mentally retarded person sometimes describes the symptoms different from a healthy person.

A skilled psychiatrist and psychotherapist is able to diagnose a depression immediately and will acquire the history of the development of the disorder (disposition, triggers, problems in the daily life and/or during childhood, repeated disturbing thoughts and finally organic illnesses assessed via additional examinations) together with the patient. The adequate therapy should start at an early stage. According to the variety of existing medications and psychotherapeutic approaches the therapist has to carefully evaluate the adequate treatment.

The psychiatrist will suggest a mixture of different therapy approaches, including different medications and forms of psychotherapy under consideration of the patient's personality, daily requirements and social environment. Depending on the education of the physician he will then either start the treatment himself or work together with other specialists, mainly behavioural therapists. For all forms of depressions researchers nowadays assume that these disorders are similar to the interaction between the development and transmission of neural impulses in the brain. In these cases all anti-depressive medications are effective, especially the new ones. These medications usually take about one to two weeks before they affect the necessary adjustment on and in the according cell structures. Also psychotherapy and additional approaches such as sleep deprivation, phototherapy or in certain cases electroconvulsive shock therapy (sometimes erroneously describes as "electro shock therapy") are assumed to interact via the same mechanisms. In general, depressions can be treated quite effectively by experienced specialists. In severe and untreated cases, however, approximately 10 – 12% of the patients commit suicide.