

Screening Questions for Major Depression

OVERVIEW

Major depression has a very high lifetime prevalence of 16.6 percent in the U.S. population—meaning that one out of six individuals has current or past major depression (R. C. Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, & Walters, 2005). Questions about vegetative symptoms of depression early in an interview are nonthreatening to clients, and it is wise to screen for depression in all settings. Thus, a good place to start an interview would be asking about *vegetative symptoms* of depression, specifically, appetite changes, weight gain or loss, decreased energy level, and changes in sleep. These questions are similar to what the client might be asked by the primary care physician.

- *How has your sleep been lately? Have you been having any difficulties with your sleep? What are they? Are you sleeping too much? Too little?*
- *How is your appetite? Have you been eating too much? Too little?*
- *How is your energy level? Do you have enough energy to do everything you need to do?*
- *Have you gained or lost any weight lately? How much? Over what time period?*

You can also ask screening questions about mood and *anhedonia* (lack of interest in pleasurable activities). Be sure to address irritable mood as well, which is sometimes more prominent than sad mood or anhedonia.

- *Have you ever had a period of a couple weeks when you felt down most of the time? When was that?*
- *Have you been having any problems with irritability? How long has that been going on?*
- *Have you ever had a period of a couple weeks when you just weren't interested in your usual activities? When was that?*

If the client answers yes to any of these questions, ask further questions about depressive symptoms.

Certain medical issues are commonly associated with depression (including temporal lobe epilepsy, post-partum and cardiac disease among others). Additionally, certain medical problems can have similar symptoms to depression: endocrine disorders, sleep disorders, Parkinson's among others (Medscape, 2013). Some medications can cause mood changes (Medscape, 2013). *For these reasons, it is always wise for a client to discuss depression with her primary care physician.* This is even more important when the client is not a young adult and has no history of prior depression.

REFERENCES

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