How Do You Get Tested for Depression?

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How to Get Tested for Depression

We have come so far as a species with our access to information and technology. The data is clear that we are living longer thanks to scientific and technological innovation. However, regardless of the incredible strides in the scientific community, there are areas where we still fall short. When it comes to diagnosing mental illness, we have a long way to go.

Your Role as a Patient

Think of your last visit to the doctor for a physical discomfort you may have experienced. The way doctors diagnose us has a lot to do with the information we tell them.

They may ask us where we feel pain, how often, and the frequency. A lot of the time, they require our input to make a more accurate diagnosis. Unfortunately, the reality is not like Star Trek where our entire body is scanned and all ailments are discovered.

If you have yet to go to a doctor for a mental health issue, simply use your imagination. Maybe you have been feeling depressed for a while and are not finding joy in the things you used to. You believe you may be depressed and would like to be tested.

A diagnosis for depression is completely up to us to tell a doctor how we feel. They cannot use a tongue depressor or take a blood sample to tell us whether we have a mental illness. The information must come from the patient and this is what makes it so difficult.

How Do I Get Tested for Depression?

Since there are no blood tests or widespread technologies to test for depression, doctors need to do this through a series of questions and answers.

A doctor will use the Diagnostic Statistical Manual for Mood Disorders as a guideline to follow whether symptoms and durations match the formulated requirements.

Here is a test from Psychology Today that gives you a good idea of what kinds of questions to expect when figuring out if you are experiencing depression. This test is relatively long compared to others, such as the Psych Central test here.

Either one you decide to try, you will notice that the questions are relatively similar in style.

Why These Specific Questions?

The difference between depression and major depressive disorder needs to be distinguished. If someone you love has passed away, depression is a healthy and normal response.

Being tested for depression after such an event will most likely turn out positive, but not for major depressive disorder. If a common stressor occurs, the doctor will take this into high consideration and judge this as a normal response to stress.

The questions asked in a depression test are meant to distinguish regular sadness and healthy depression from major depressive disorder. The multiple choice answers will most likely be on a frequency and severity scale. For example:

I spend time thinking about how I might kill or harm myself:

1. Not at all
2. Just a little
3. Somewhat
4. Moderately
5. Quite a lot
6. All the time

You can most likely realize how important this scale is for a doctor diagnosing someone who is feeling depressed.

The Future of Testing for Depression

The thought of a future that looks like Star Trek isn't as unbelievable as we think. Brain scans may eventually be able to help with diagnosing different types of depression. Using MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scans researchers can find biomarkers for depression, seeing which parts of the brain are most active and inactive.

To acknowledge the need for a more scientific approach to diagnosing depression, we need to know more about the shortcomings of diagnosing through symptoms. People with depression usually go months or even years of trial and error before they get relief. The treatments do vary for each individual but cannot be tailored specifically to their biology and gene make-up.

Fortunately, gene tests are available and can reveal the chances of side effects to a certain antidepressant. However, these tests are not covered by insurance and are extremely expensive.

The brain scans researchers look at involve putting electrodes on the brain and measuring the blood flow into certain parts of the brain, resulting in theories of 'connectivity features.' Given a large sample size, researchers can see similarities between people diagnosed with depression versus those who are not.

This technology will assist in diagnosing people accurately so that treatments can be more effective and work faster than our current system.

What Should I Do to Get Tested for Depression?

The most common and best way to find out if you have major depressive disorder is to see a doctor in person and talk about how you have been feeling as of late. It may seem old-fashioned compared to the unknown future of diagnostic brain scans but it is the most accessible kind of testing we have available.

If you have been feeling depressed for no apparent reason, without a specific reason, this may be time to try an online test and then see a professional in person.