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**DEPRESSION AS THE WORLDWIDE DISEASE  
OF THE 21 CENTURY**

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Depression was diagnosed as far back as in the times of Hippocrates, an ancient Greek physician, who named this disease melancholia. Now it is a common illness with approximately 350 million people affected.

Depression is a mental disorder, characterized by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-esteem, disturbance of sleep or appetite, feeling of tiredness and poor concentration. It can affect anyone regardless of age, ethnic background, socio-economic status or gender. The causes of depression are thought to be a combination of genetic, biological and emotional factors. There are many tools available to diagnose depression. Most of them are based on the diagnostic criteria given in the International Classification of Disease. Depending upon the number and severity of symptoms any depressive episode may be specified as mild, moderate or severe.

Especially in long-lasting cases with moderate or severe intensity, depression may become a serious health condition. It can cause an affected person to suffer greatly and function poorly at work, at school and in the family. At its worst form, depression can lead to suicide. Suicide results in as estimated 1 million deaths every year.

There are many different types of depression treatment. The most common methods are antidepressant medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of both of them. Herbal remedies act in a similar way to some antidepressants. In some cases, when a patient cannot take medication due to health reasons, or when rapid symptoms relief is necessary, for example, in patients who are suicidal, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is administrated. There are some alternative methods of treatment, including regular exercise, light- therapy, food supplements, relaxation and meditation, acupuncture.

Although some effective methods of depression treatment are known fewer than half of those affected in the world receive them. Barriers to effective care include the lack of resources, trained health care providers and social stigma associated with mental disorders.