



Understanding Depression

What is Depression?

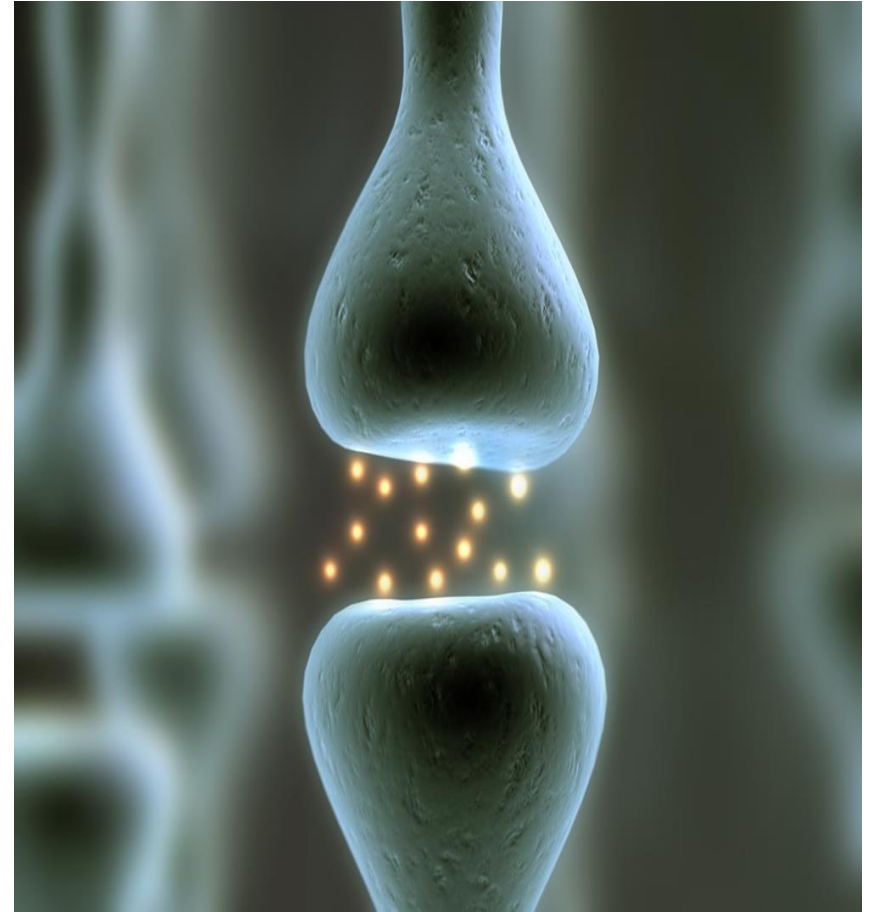
- Depression is more than just a low mood or a sign of personal weakness
- Depression is a serious medical condition with many emotional, cognitive, physical and behavioural symptoms
- People with depression find it hard to function every day and may be reluctant to participate in activities they once enjoyed

Causes of Depression

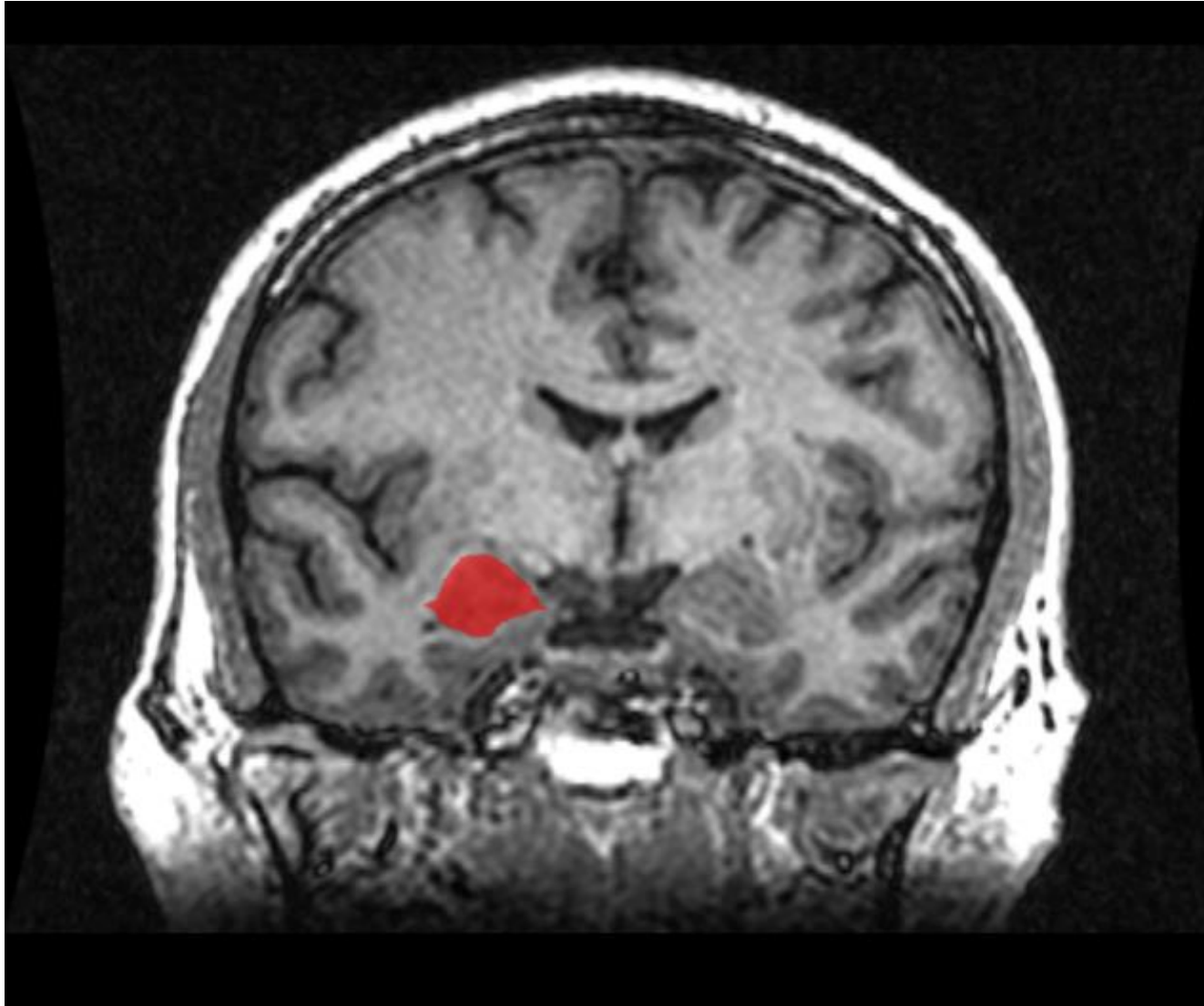
- The brain is composed of millions of interconnecting nerve cells called **neurons**. In order for a person to think, move, or feel these neurons must communicate with one another. They do so by sending and receiving chemical messengers called **neurotransmitters**. When a neurotransmitter is released from a neuron, it crosses a cleft, or **synapse**, and binds to a receptor on another neuron, and thus the signal is passed on.

Neurons, neurotransmitters and synapses

- Neurotransmitters are chemicals that transmit signals from a neuron to a target cell across a synapse.
- Neurotransmitters are synthesized from amino acids in the diet and are broken down by the body after use.



The Amygdala



The Amygdala

- The amygdala performs a primary role in the processing and memory of emotional reactions
- People with depression and anxiety disorders have shown decreased size and increased activity in the amygdala
- Antidepressants and/or psychotherapy can normalize amygdala size and activity

Role of serotonin

- Although depression can be triggered by an emotional event in a person's life, a decrease in the levels of at least one of the neurotransmitters, **serotonin**, has been linked in the biology of depression

Effects of depression

- Depression is a condition in which a person feels an overwhelming and debilitating unhappiness
- People who are depressed may have trouble thinking clearly and be unable to perform normal functions
- They may be uninterested in eating and be unable to sleep, or they may engage in these activities excessively
- Persons with depression may even have thoughts of suicide

Antidepressant medications

- Antidepressants are often prescribed, alongside psychological treatments, for moderate to severe depression/anxiety.
- Antidepressant medication works on the chemicals in the brain related to emotions and motivation
- The decision to use antidepressants should be made in conjunction with a doctor after careful assessment

Types of antidepressants

- Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (**SSRIs**)
- Serotonin and Noradrenalin Reuptake Inhibitors (**SNRIs**)
- Reversible Inhibitors of MonoAmine oxidase (**RIMAs**)
- TriCyclic Antidepressants (**TCAs**)
- Noradrenaline-Serotonin Specific Antidepressants (**NaSSAs**)
- Noradrenalin Reuptake Inhibitors (**NARIs**)

Who is affected by depression?

- About 1 in 10 people in Canada will experience an episode of major depressive disorder during their lifetime
- Depression is among the leading causes of disability worldwide
- Women are more likely than men to experience symptoms of depression
- People with a family history of depression may be more likely to develop this disorder
- People with chronic illnesses may also be more susceptible

Cognitive Distortions

- All-or-Nothing Thinking
- Overgeneralization
- Mental Filter
- Disqualifying the Positive
- Jumping to Conclusions
- Magnification and Minimization
- Emotional Reasoning
- Should Statements
- Labelling and Mislabelling
- Personalization

David Burns, **Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy**. Avon Books: New York, 1999.



Symptoms Checklist

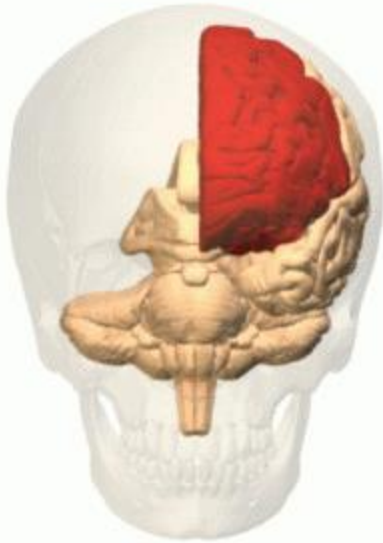
- Feelings of sadness
- Loss/lack of interest
- Significant weight loss/gain
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feelings of Restlessness
- No energy

- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Unexplained aches and pains

Duration of symptoms

- Do your symptoms typically last most of the day?
- Do you experience your symptoms nearly every day?
- Have you been experiencing your symptoms for at least two consecutive weeks?
- Have your symptoms interfered with or impaired your ability to take part in social, family, work or other activities?

Frontal lobes



- The frontal lobes are involved in the higher mental functions of the brain
- Medication, exercise, psychotherapy, and meditation can all increase frontal lobe activity

Cognitive Therapy for Depression

- Cognitive therapy was developed by Aaron Beck in the 1960s to treat people with depression
- Negative thoughts influence our feelings and begin the downward spiral into depression
- Negative thoughts can be replaced with more positive, truthful thoughts and halt depression before it starts

Self Care Strategies

- Mindfulness and Meditation
- Nutritional Guidance
- Sleep Hygiene
- Exercise
- Pleasant Events Schedule
- Emotion Regulation
- Assertiveness Training

