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Understanding Depression (Understanding Health and Sickness)

M.D. Patricia Ainsworth

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Depression has been a scourge of mankind since the dawn of ages. Vivid images from historical and religious texts describe sufferers of the illness we now know as depression. An "equal opportunity" illness, it exempts no one based on race, sex, creed, religion, social status, or nation of origin. It affects one in five of us and its potentially lethal outcome--suicide--is the third leading cause of death among American teenagers. What is this illness that costs us $44 billion each year? What does it look like? Is it moodiness? Is it the result of a character flaw? Can we just "snap out of it"?

Understanding Depression explores the reality of the illness from the author's twin perspectives as a psychiatrist and as a family member who experienced the tragedy of depression first hand. Using examples from her practice, the author discusses the different types of depression, the kinds of people at risk, and the risk factors of suicide. In understandable terms the book looks at the way the brain works and how the body communicates with it, including recent discoveries about how the process fails in depression.

The book mirrors the author's belief that understanding depression is only half the battle. Taking personal responsibility for fighting the beast is equally important. Treatment methods, discussed here, include various forms of psychotherapy, different classes of antidepressant medications, and the controversial subjects of "shock" treatment and involuntary treatment.

Understanding Depression also offers tips for fighting depression day by day. Finally, the book takes a look at the cutting-edge research that holds promise for better management of depression and at new weapons to combat it.

Patricia Ainsworth is a psychiatrist in private practice and is an assistant professor (part time) in the department of psychiatry and human behavior at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

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