

Opinion: Opening up about depression

By Steven Petrow, New York Times

I have slogged through a number of difficult situations in recent months, among them the ongoing crises of my elderly parents' illnesses and the suicide of a friend. I never lost my appetite nor burst into tears, and I didn't suffer from any of the other typical symptoms of depression. Maybe I was more irritable than usual, a bit more prone to snap. And yes, I buried myself in my work. But I didn't think I'd tripped down into the rabbit hole of depression.

You would think I would have been more self-aware, both personally and professionally. As a health journalist, I have often used my own stories to write about difficult-to-discuss medical conditions, including learning I had testicular cancer at age 26 and my misdiagnosis with H.I.V./AIDS – back when it was a death sentence. But I had never written about suffering from depression, even though it's plagued me since I first put pen to paper, at age 11, when I started keeping a diary.

Still, I'm far from alone. At least six million men in the United States suffer from depression, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. The true number is likely to be even higher, said Dr. Matthew Rudorfer, the institute's associate director for treatment research, since men are less likely than women to report classic symptoms like low mood, sadness or crying, so they often go undiagnosed. Men, he told me, more often demonstrate "externalizing" symptoms like irritability, anger and aggressiveness, substance and alcohol abuse, risk-taking behaviors and "workaholism."

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