

# DEPRESSION

## Ailment affects 20 percent of A&M students

BY MELISSA PRICE  
 THE BATTALION

At first George Hirsch (not his real name) thought he was just sick. He was never hungry and he always felt tired. However, when most people were sound asleep, Hirsch was still wide awake. But it was not the flu or any other physical illness that had Hirsch singing the blues — it was depression.

Hirsch, a sophomore construction science major who was diagnosed with minor depression in December 1995, is part of the 20 percent of Texas A&M students who suffer from depression. Hirsch said he always felt like he was under emotional and physical pressure.

"I just felt like someone was standing on my chest the whole time," Hirsch said. Ted Stachowiak, associate director of Student Counseling Services at A&M, said depression is generally defined as a state of sadness in which a person usually experiences diminished pleasure in all activities. People with depression withdraw themselves from others and have feelings of loneliness and/or worthlessness.

Stachowiak said depression can be triggered by either a traumatic event in a person's life, or a biological cause. Stressful events such as starting or graduating from school, beginning a new job or having a baby can cause a person to experience depression.

Stachowiak said people suffering from depression should seek help as soon as they realize they have a problem.

"If a person finds themselves not being able to cope with their depression, some sort of intervention is needed," Stachowiak said. "The sooner you get in for help, the easier it will be to overcome."

In a recent study conducted by the University of Northern Iowa, researchers found that over half of the people in the study diagnosed with major depression had self-esteem problems and dysfunctional attitudes. The study also found depression is two times more common in women than in men. Stachowiak said it is important to remember more women than men tend

to report feelings of depression.

Hirsch, who used to be in the Corps of Cadets, said although he always seemed to spend time studying or shining boots, he didn't really have the desire to spend time with his friends.

"I didn't want to be around people, but I would feel better when I did go out and do something," Hirsch said. "But the depression comes back when you're by yourself; the rooms are so bare — it's like a jail cell."

The HelpLine, a 24-hour recorded information line sponsored by the Student Counseling Service, provides students with information on depression, relationship issues and other issues affecting students. The HelpLine said everyone ex-

periences some form of depression at some time in his or her life, such as feelings resulting from the break-up of a relationship or the death of a loved one.

But Hirsch, for example, suffers from clinical depression. Clinical depression differs from feelings of everyday depression in that the symptoms continue for months or years and grow worse over time.

Stachowiak said people who are clinically depressed experience isolation, feelings of guilt, self-critical thoughts, and problems concentrating.

"They'll read a textbook for an hour and have no idea what they've just read,"

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## Disease shouldn't generate stereotypes

Everyone has bad days. But for some, bad days are more the rule than the exception.

With the stress of classes and work, many college students go through phases of bad days, months and sometimes entire semesters.

Although some students are able to overcome these bad times, others are mired in what is clinically termed "depression." Oftentimes, these students do not know they are depressed or if it is severe enough to seek outside help.

I am one of these students. For the last year and a half, I have gone

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through a phase where I have lost interest in and focus on things in my life.

I thought I was just experiencing the blues or having a string of bad semesters. I could not put a finger on what I was feeling, and when people asked me what was wrong, I could not explain what I was feeling. It is hard to explain something to others you cannot explain to yourself.

It was not until recently I decided enough was enough. I was sick of always being in a bad mood and not feeling positive about life. My parents had become increasingly worried and suggested I talk to a pro-

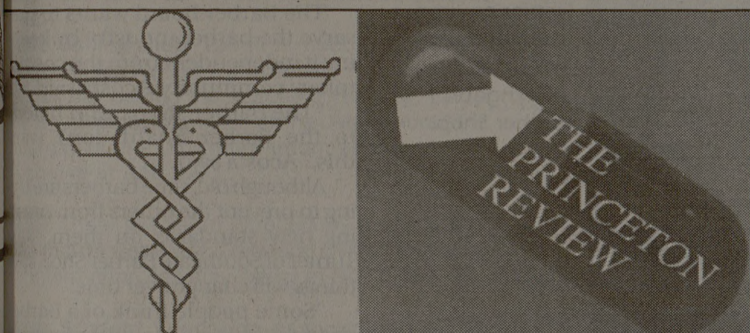
fessional counselor.

My first thought was, "A shrink? Only crazy people need go to psychologists." But I finally decided it couldn't hurt and it might even help to talk with someone licensed to deal with people who experience symptoms of depression.

With the help of my psychologist, I was able to sort through what had been going on for the last year and a half and give it a name: clinical depression.

Depression. It was a foreign word to me. I had read about people who were depressed and associated them with problems such as a bad family life, abuse and other more severe problems that I had not experienced.

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