Occasional feelings of sadness or “the blues” are a normal part of life. However, when these feelings last for more than a few weeks, it may mean that a person is suffering from depression, which is a medical condition. Warning signs that someone may be struggling with depression include:

- Significant increase or decrease in appetite
- Prolonged change in sleep patterns
- Chronic fatigue or lack of energy
- Poor concentration or memory
- Physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomach aches
- Loss of interest or pleasure in leisure activities
- Sadness, grief, guilt, hopelessness, or low self-esteem

Mild or short-term bouts of depression may be helped by:

- Eating regular meals that include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- Aiming for seven to nine hours of sleep a night
- Avoiding or minimizing the use of alcohol or legal drugs
- Exercising 20-30 minutes a day four to five times a week
- Talking to supportive family or friends about the situation
- Breaking routine by trying a new activity or taking a short trip

The Warning Signs of Depression and Suicide

Long-term or severe feelings of depression require professional assistance. Talking to a professional counselor often helps to alleviate symptoms. In addition, some individuals may benefit from an anti-depressant or other prescribed medication.

Feelings of depression may sometimes escalate into suicidal thoughts or even actions. Behaviors that may indicate that a person is at risk for suicide include:

- Drastic changes in behavior
- Withdrawal from friends or social activities
- Recent severe losses
- Previous suicide attempts
- Giving away personal possessions
- Risky behavior and activities
- A preoccupation with death
- A sudden change from depressed behavior to a happy, calm state
- Comments like “No one would notice if I just disappeared” or “I wish I could go to sleep and never wake up”
- Statements that indicate a plan for self-harm, such as “If I were going to kill myself, I’d (description of method)”

If you are experiencing any of these warning signs, or if you notice them in a friend or family member, seek help. LifeMatters offers 24/7/365 access to resources and emotional support. Please call.