

LOOKING UP

FACTS ABOUT DEPRESSION

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What Are the Symptoms of Depression?

People feel depression in different ways. Some people have severe symptoms, while others may not. Depression is diagnosed when five or more of the symptoms listed below are experienced every day for more than two weeks.

- Depressed mood:
 - Crying a lot
 - Feeling of emptiness
 - No feelings at all
 - Feeling angry or irritable
- Decreased interest or pleasure in activities
- Problems sleeping (too much or too little)
- Feeling tired or a loss of energy
- Feeling nervous
- Excessive worrying
- Feeling guilty and useless
- Problems with memory or concentration
- A noticeable change in weight
- Alcohol and drug use
- Physical symptoms:
 - Headaches
 - Nausea
 - Stomach pain
 - Indigestion

Core symptoms vary in intensity and frequency depending on the individual. When depression is severe, suicidal thoughts, plans, or attempts may be present. If these symptoms are present, contact your healthcare provider immediately.

Treatment may include medication, talk therapy, or both. As you begin to feel better, it may be tempting to take on too much. It's better to build up to things slowly. Be sure to take things one day at a time.

When Will I Start Feeling Better?

If your practitioner prescribes antidepressant medication, it could take two to four weeks before you see an improvement. Medications work better when they are taken exactly as directed. When medications are taken correctly, you should feel an improvement in energy and able to enjoy being around people more often.

Following are a few important points to discuss with your doctor to help you achieve the greatest benefit from your medications.

- Ask your doctor to keep your medication regimen as simple as possible
- Discuss any side effects you might experience with the medication
- Make sure written instructions include:
 - What the medication does
 - How the medication should be taken
 - What to do if you experience side effects
 - How the medication's effect will be monitored

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What Is Talk Therapy?

Research has repeatedly shown that psychotherapy, or talk therapy, is very effective in the treatment of depression.

Whatever the cause of your depression, talk therapy will help you understand your feelings. Time spent in therapy can help you get control of your life. Therapists who attribute the cause of anxiety to unconscious, internal conflicts may use talk therapy to help you understand and resolve these conflicts.

There are many types of psychotherapy, but two types have been shown to be effective for treating depression:

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy assumes that depression stems from negative, often irrational thinking about oneself and one's future. In this type of therapy, a person learns to understand, and eventually eliminate, habits of negative thinking.
- In Interpersonal therapy, the therapist helps a person resolve problems in relationships with others. It also helps you understand how you think and act in relationships that may have caused the depression. The subsequent improvement in social relationships and support may help alleviate the depression.

In talk therapy, your relationship with your therapist is one of the most important aspects of your treatment. Talking with your therapist will not always be easy. It is common to feel discomfort or increased anxiety because you are expressing feelings you may not have dealt with for years. However, it is important to feel comfortable enough to start talking about your problems.

To increase the benefit you receive from your therapy, write down any questions or comments you wish to ask or share with your therapist. It is easy to forget what you want to discuss if you are nervous or stressed. Having a written list will help you stay on track and will also allow your therapist to address the issues that concern you most.

It is your right and responsibility to have a workable relationship with your therapist. If the therapist you are working with does not meet with your expectations or you feel you can not commit whole-heartedly to your treatment, make arrangements to see a different therapist.

Some people begin to feel better as soon as they start talking about their problems. Others begin to feel better within a few weeks. For those who have had more than one episode of depression, it may take longer to start experiencing positive results from therapy.

It is important to be patient with yourself. Give yourself time. Improvement can be slow. Remember, this is your path to recovery.

Are You Taking Care of Yourself?

While medications and therapy sessions can have a large effect on your mood, there are many things that you can do to make yourself feel better. This includes making sure you take good care of yourself. The following suggestions are small steps that can make a big difference in your well-being.

1. Take care of your physical health. When you are depressed, you increase your chances of becoming physically sick (like with a cold or the flu).
2. Set up a regular sleep schedule. Try to go to sleep and wake up at about the same time each day.
3. Eat a well-balanced diet and eat at regular times each day.
4. Exercise. Walk, jog, or aerobics. (Before you start an exercise program, check with your doctor.) People who exercise feel better about themselves.
5. Have fun. Watch a funny movie. Find a new restaurant. Listen to music that makes you feel good. Avoid isolating yourself. Life is more than worry and work.

Simple goals:

1. Learn new skills
2. Change bad habits
3. Reduce Stress

“The road to success is often begun with some very small steps.”

- ALBERT EINSTEIN



Write it Down

Start a journal to record your thoughts and feelings. You may find this a useful tool to help you identify important issues that effect your depression in a positive or negative way. Your journal is a private place to honestly express your thoughts and feelings. As time passes, review your earlier entries. Take the time to reflect on how therapy has changed your perceptions about yourself.

The road to recovery can be frustratingly slow and you may have failed to notice the many successful small steps you have achieved. Do not get discouraged. The journal will help you identify where you have made progress and areas where some additional effort may be necessary.

Use your journal to record your thoughts, observations, and reflections on problems, events, set-backs, and successes.

Write about things that have caused you to feel hopeless, sad, guilty, or anxious. You should also write about the things that make you feel productive, interested, confident, and happy. It is very important to record your positive and negative thoughts. This will allow you to get a more balanced view of your progress.

How do you start?

If you are not used to writing in a journal, keep it simple at first until you are more comfortable.

Write down a sentence or two for each of the following:

- Describe the event or problem
- How the event or problem made you feel
- How the event or problem was resolved
- How you felt about the resolution

Recognizing patterns in behavior or perception that have an effect on your moods can be a very important step in determining your course of treatment.

You may wish to share some of your journal entries with your therapist. Getting constructive feedback can help you put your feelings in perspective.

You Are Not Alone

Depression is the number one diagnosed behavioral health condition. Statistics show one in four women and one in eight men suffer from a form of depression.

Depression affects all people, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic standing.

Depression occurs in all parts of the world, although, the pattern of symptoms vary. A number of studies indicate that depression rates have increased worldwide during the past several decades. Furthermore, younger generations are experiencing depression at an earlier age than previous generations.

Social scientists have proposed many explanations, including changes in family structure, urbanization, and reduced cultural and religious influences.

Although depression may appear anytime from childhood to old age, it usually begins during a person's 20s or 30s. Depression may come on slowly, and then deepen gradually over months or years. On the other hand, it may erupt suddenly in a few days or weeks.

Although rare, a person who develops severe depression may appear so confused, frightened, and unbalanced that observers speak of a nervous breakdown.

However, as it begins, depression causes serious changes in a person's feelings and outlook. A person with major depression feels sad nearly every day and may cry often. People, work, and activities that used to bring pleasure, no longer do.

What causes depression?

Depression may seem to come out of the blue, even when things are going well. Other times it may seem to have an obvious cause — a marital conflict, financial difficulty, or some personal failure. Yet many people with these problems do not experience deep depression.

Many psychologists believe depression results from an interaction between stressful life events and a person's biological and psychological vulnerabilities.

You are not alone. There is help for your illness. You and your doctor can work together to find the best form of treatment for your depression.



Facts About Child and Adolescent Depression

A family history of depression puts your child at increased risk for developing the illness. If you or your spouse is depressed or under great stress, consider counseling to learn how you can avoid passing depressed thinking on to your child. Thirty percent of children with depressed parents develop the illness.

It is very important for parents to step in at the earliest signs of a child's depression. Untreated, depressive episodes are likely to recur and be worse each time. In the worst cases, depression can lead to suicide. Depression is the third leading cause of adolescent death in the United States. By stepping in, you are preventing your child's depression from possibly becoming a more serious.

An estimated ten percent of children and adolescents suffer from depression while growing up, but at least half never get help. Genetics and early experiences increase the odds. Social pressures and hormonal changes put adolescents at even greater risk.

So how do you tell if your child is depressed or just moody?

While depressed adults may seem mad, depressed children and teens are more likely to feel and act irritable.

Symptoms of child and adolescent depression may include:

- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Withdrawal from family and friends (staying in their room watching TV)
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Recurrent vague physical complaints, such as headache or stomachache
- An unexpected drop in grades at school
- Skipping classes or quitting activities such as sports, clubs, and social groups

Keep the lines of communication open between you and your child so they have a comfortable and safe environment in which to express their feelings. This will help you to determine if your child is experiencing a temporary moody period or is having a more serious issue.

If you notice that any of the above changes in your child's behavior lasts for two weeks or more, they may be caused by depression or another mood disorder, such as bipolar disorder. In adolescents, girls are more likely to suffer from depression than boys at a rate of 2:1. In younger children, the rate is equal.

Doctors recommend that you watch how your child deals with life changes. If he or she doesn't bounce back from rough times consult your child's doctor to get help.

If needed, request a referral to a mental health professional. Treatment choices include talk therapy, family counseling, antidepressants, or may include a combination of the three.

How Do You De-Stress?

Most psychologists agree that for someone with depression, stress can be a contributing factor to the degree of depression that person experiences.

What can you do to lower the level of stress you may be encountering?

For many people, the responsibility of work and family obligations leaves them little time to relax. Just as you have commitments at the office and at home, you have a commitment to take care of yourself.

Following are a few simple ways to de-stress. The following activities are just a few suggestions that can help you de-stress. Make an appointment with yourself. Block off a time each week to spend doing an activity that you enjoy or you can choose one of the following:

- Enjoy a book. Reading a good story can transport you to an interesting place
- Be creative. Start an art project or kit
- Create indoor or outdoor gardens
- Find a scenic area to go bike riding
- Visit a local park and enjoy the beauty of nature
- Join an exercise or yoga class

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