

Depression

Everyone feels down from time to time and that is a normal part of life. You may experience sadness, irritability or have trouble sleeping once in a while, but when emotions such as hopelessness and despair take over and just won't go away, you may have depression.

Depression makes it tough to function and enjoy life like you once did. But no matter how hopeless you feel, by understanding the cause and recognizing the different symptoms and types of depression, you can take the first step to feeling better and overcoming the problem.

Depression is a common but serious mood disorder that may cause severe symptoms. It affects the ability to feel, think, and just trying to get through the day can be overwhelming. It can interfere with your ability to work, study, eat, sleep and enjoy life. The feelings can be severe and won't go away, and if not treated, can have little to no relief.

While some people describe depression as having a feeling of sadness and doom, others feel lifeless and empty. No matter how you experience depression, if not treated, it can become a serious health condition. But it's important to remember that feelings of helplessness and hopelessness are symptoms of depression—not the reality of your situation.

Depression varies from person to person and according to the National Institute of Mental Health, there are some common signs and symptoms.

- 1) **Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.** A dark outlook—nothing will ever get better and there's nothing you can do to improve your situation.
- 2) **Loss of interest in daily activities.** You don't care anymore about hobbies, pastimes, social activities, or sex. You've lost your ability to feel joy and pleasure.
- 3) **Appetite or weight changes.** Significant weight loss or weight gain—a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month.
- 4) **Sleep changes.** Either sleeplessness, especially waking in the early hours of the morning, or tired all the time and oversleeping.
- 5) **Anger or irritability.** Feeling agitated, restless, or even violent. Your tolerance level is low, your temper short, and everything and everyone gets on your nerves.
- 6) **Loss of energy.** Feeling fatigued, slow, and physically drained. Your whole body may feel heavy, and even small tasks are tiring and take longer to complete.
- 7) **Self-loathing.** Strong feelings of worthlessness or guilt. You harshly criticize yourself for perceived faults and mistakes.
- 8) **Reckless behavior.** You engage in risky behavior such as substance abuse, gambling, reckless driving, or dangerous sports.
- 9) **Concentration problems.** Trouble focusing, making decisions, or remembering things.
- 10) **Unexplained aches and pains.** An increase in physical complaints such as headaches, back pain, aching muscles, and stomach pain.

Depression comes in many forms and severities. First, it's important to determine whether your depression symptoms are due to an underlying medical condition. If so, that condition will need to be treated also. The severity of your depression is another factor. The more severe the depression, the more intensive the treatment you're likely to need. Knowing what type of depression you suffer from can help you get the most effective treatment. Some of the types of depression include:

Major depression - Major depression is much less common than mild or moderate depression and is characterized by severe, relentless symptoms.

- Left untreated, major depression typically lasts for about six months.
- Some people experience just a single depressive episode in their lifetime, but major depression can be a recurring disorder.

Atypical depression - Atypical depression is a common subtype of major depression with a specific symptom pattern. It responds better to some therapies and medications than others, so identifying it can be helpful.

- People with atypical depression experience a temporary mood lift in response to positive events, such as after receiving good news or while out with friends.
- Other symptoms of atypical depression include weight gain, increased appetite, sleeping excessively, a heavy feeling in the arms and legs, and sensitivity to rejection.

Dysthymia (recurrent, mild depression) - Dysthymia is a type of chronic "low-grade" depression. More days than not, you feel mildly or moderately depressed, although you may have brief periods of normal mood.

- The symptoms of dysthymia are not as strong as the symptoms of major depression, but without care they last a long time (at least two years).
- Some people also experience major depressive episodes on top of dysthymia, a condition known as "double depression."
- If you suffer from dysthymia, you may feel like you've always been depressed. Or you may think that your continuous low mood is "just the way you are."

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) - For some people, the reduced daylight hours of winter lead to a form of depression known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD). SAD affects about 1% to 2% of the population, particularly women and young people. SAD can make you feel like a completely different person to who you are in the summer: hopeless, sad, tense, or stressed, with no interest in friends or activities you normally love. SAD usually begins in fall or winter when the days become shorter and remains until the brighter days of spring.

While some illnesses have a specific medical cause, depression is more complicated. Depression is caused by a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors. In other words, your

lifestyle choices, relationships, and coping skills matter just as much as your genes. Understanding the cause of your depression can help you get the correct help for your problem.

When you're depressed, it can feel like there's nothing you can do. But there are many things you can do to improve your mood. The key is to start with a few small goals and slowly build from there, trying to do a little more each day. Feeling better takes time, but you can get there by making healthy lifestyle choices.

- Reach out to other people – simply talking to someone can be a big help. The more you connect with your social network, the more protected you are from depression. If you are feeling stuck, don't hesitate to talk to trusted family members or friend, or seek out help at a depression support group, for example. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness and it won't mean you're a burden to others. Often, the simple act of talking to someone face-to-face can be an enormous help. The person just has to be a good listener who will not be distracted or judging.
- Get moving – Regular exercise, even when you don't feel like it, can be effective with the symptoms of depression. Start with small activities, walk or dance around the house to music, and build up from there.
- Eat a mood boosting diet – Stay away from caffeine, alcohol, trans fats, and sugars. Increase nutrients such as those found in leafy greens and Omega 3 fatty acids found in fish.
- Find ways to interact with the world – Take a walk in nature, care for a pet, volunteer, work on a hobby. If you participate in activities with other people, you will start to feel better.

When lifestyle changes and activities aren't enough, it may be time to seek care from a mental health professional who may recommend therapy or medications.

It is important to understand that you should not rely on medications alone. Although medication can relieve the symptoms of depression, it is not usually suitable for long-term use. However, If you do decide to try medication, keep in mind that medication works best when you make healthy lifestyle changes as well.

Other treatments, including exercise and therapy, can be just as effective as medication, often even more so, and don't come with unwanted side effects. Therapy can also offer you the skills and tips to prevent depression from coming back.

Remember it takes time to find the right treatment for your need. Sometimes depression treatments might feel overwhelming or frustratingly slow. That is normal. Recovery usually has its ups and downs. It may take some trial and error to find the treatment and support that works best for you. You must be open to change and a little experimentation.

Remember if you experience signs of depression which interfere with your day to day life, tell someone and seek help. You should discuss your concerns with your Personal Care Doctor at your next visit so that they can direct you into the care option that is right for you. Or better yet, schedule a visit now to discuss this issue and get on the road to treatment so that you can live a healthier, happier life beginning now!