

Depression

is a medical illness.
is common.
is treatable.

What You Need to Know About Depression

Depression is a medical illness that affects your mood, behavior, thinking and health. Depression is a common illness experienced by nearly one in 10 Americans each year. Depression does not discriminate; it affects men and women, young and old, and people of all races, cultures, and incomes.

It is normal to feel sadness or grief when a loved one dies, if you lose your job or a relationship ends. But sadness and depression are not the same. While feelings of sadness will lessen with time, depression is an illness that can continue for months, or even years without treatment.

Seventy to 80 percent of people with depression improve significantly with appropriate treatment, and almost all individuals receive some symptom relief and benefit from medical care. Depression is not a “bad day” or a character weakness.

Depression is a serious but treatable medical illness. With proper treatment, people with depression can lead full and productive lives.

If you have depression, getting medical attention now can dramatically improve your life at home and at work.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

THERE ARE TWO MAIN SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION:

- Persistent feelings of sadness or anxiety
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities that lasts for more than two weeks

OTHER SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS INCLUDE:

- Changes in appetite that result in weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue

- Restlessness or irritability
- Feelings of worthlessness or persistent guilt
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Ongoing body aches and pains, or problems with digestion that are not caused by physical disease
- Increased drinking, cigarette smoking, or using prescription or illicit drugs
- *Thoughts of death or suicide or attempted suicide – if this is the case you should seek help immediately.*

If you think you may have depression, see your physician or a mental health professional to learn more and understand how you can be helped.

Depression Affects Your Life at Home and Work

Depression can affect all aspects of your life, including time spent with family and friends, how you feel about yourself, and your performance at work. Depression makes it difficult to enjoy activities you once enjoyed.

If you are experiencing depression you might find yourself working more slowly and less effectively. You might be tired or irritable and have trouble getting along with or communicating with your family members, friends and co-workers. If your depression is severe, you may have a very hard time just getting out of bed and going to work.

What Causes Depression?

Several factors play a role in the onset of depression:

- **BIOCHEMISTRY.** Disturbances in chemicals in the brain, like serotonin and norepinephrine, are thought to be connected to certain symptoms of depression, including anxiety, irritability, and fatigue.
- **GENETICS.** Depression runs in families. For example, if one identical twin has depression, the other twin has a 70% chance of also having the illness sometime in life.
- **THINKING PATTERNS.** People with low self-esteem, who are easily overwhelmed by stress, or who are generally pessimistic appear to be more vulnerable to depression.
- **ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS.** Repeated exposure to violence, neglect, poverty, or physical, sexual, or mental abuse may make people who are already susceptible to depression all the more vulnerable to the illness.
- **OTHER MEDICAL CONDITIONS.** People with chronic illnesses such as asthma, diabetes, cancer, stroke, chronic pain, alcoholism or other drug disorders, heart disease or HIV are at higher risk for depression.
- **THE BIRTH OF A BABY.** Although getting the “blues” is common among new mothers, symptoms that are prolonged or severe may indicate postpartum depression.

Getting Help for Depression

If you think you may have depression, remember that you are not alone. Seek help. Below is a list of steps to consider when seeking help.

1. Check your health plan to find out what benefits are available to you. Your employer may have an Employee Assistance Program. These programs should be confidential, are often free or inexpensive, and can be a vital resource for the treatment of depression and other mental health issues.
2. Make an appointment and visit a physician or mental health professional. Because of the interaction of depression and other medical conditions, an evaluation by a physician is strongly advisable.

Your healthcare professional will talk with you and evaluate your symptoms, your medical and family history, and stresses to determine an accurate diagnosis and suggest the best treatment for you. You may be prescribed an antidepressant medication, offered talk therapy, or both. Medications and therapy are highly effective for most people and often the best treatment is a combination of both.

3. Make sure you understand the treatment you are offered. Talk regularly with your physician or mental health professional about how you are doing. If you are prescribed medication, talk with your physician about potential side effects and how long it will take to work. If you have concerns about your treatment, talk to your healthcare professional.
4. Ask your healthcare professional about ways you can actively participate in your treatment, such as:
 - Following your treatment plan and keeping regular appointments with healthcare professionals
 - Spending time with people who care about you
 - Staying physically active by walking or exercising regularly
 - Getting on a regular sleep schedule
 - Keeping up your normal work and life routine
 - Understanding what triggers or worsens your mood problems

Depression can make it hard to seek help. But taking action now will help you feel better sooner.

For more information, visit www.workplacementalhealth.org.

The National Partnership
for Workplace Mental Health

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The National Partnership for Workplace Mental Health educates employers and employees about mental health issues. It is a program of the American Psychiatric Foundation in collaboration with the American Psychiatric Association and America's employers. The foundation's mission is to advance public understanding that mental illnesses are real and can be effectively treated.

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