

DEPRESSION

Do you feel very tired, helpless, and hopeless? Are you sad most of the time and take no pleasure in your family, friends, or hobbies? Are you having trouble working, sleeping, eating, and functioning? Have you felt this way for a long time? If so, you may be suffering from depression.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Everyone feels sad sometimes, but these feelings usually pass after a few days. When you have depression, you have trouble with daily life for weeks at a time. Depression is a serious illness that deserves treatment.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF DEPRESSION?

Some forms of depression are:

Major depression—severe symptoms that interfere with your ability to work, sleep, study, eat, and enjoy life. An episode can occur just once in a person’s lifetime, but more often, a person has several episodes.

Dysthymic disorder, or dysthymia—depressive symptoms that last a long time (2 years or longer) but are less severe than those of major depression.

Minor depression—similar to major depression and dysthymia, but symptoms are less severe and may not last as long.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION?

Different people have different symptoms. Some symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad or “empty”
- Feeling hopeless, irritable, anxious, or guilty
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Feeling very tired
- Not being able to concentrate or remember details
- Not being able to sleep, or sleeping too much
- Overeating, or not wanting to eat at all
- Thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems.

WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION?

Several factors, or a combination of factors, may contribute to depression.

Genes—people with a family history of depression may be more likely to develop it than those whose families do not have the illness.

Brain chemistry—people with depression have different brain chemistry than those without the illness.

Stress—loss of a loved one, a difficult relationship, or any stressful situation may trigger depression.

DOES DEPRESSION LOOK THE SAME IN EVERYONE?

No. Depression affects different people in different ways.

Women experience depression more often than men. Biological, life cycle, and hormonal factors that are unique to women may be linked to women's higher depression rate. Women with depression typically have symptoms of sadness, worthlessness, and guilt.

Men with depression are more likely to be very tired, irritable, and sometimes even angry. They may lose interest in work or activities they once enjoyed, and have trouble sleeping.

Older adults with depression may have less obvious symptoms, or they may be less likely to admit to feelings of sadness or grief. They also are more likely to have medical conditions like heart disease or stroke, which may cause or contribute to depression. Certain medications can also have side effects that contribute to depression.

Children with depression may pretend to be sick, refuse to go to school, cling to a parent, or worry that a parent may die. Older children or teens may get into trouble at school and be irritable. Because these signs can also be part of normal mood swings associated with certain childhood stages, it may be difficult to accurately diagnose a young person with depression.

HOW IS DEPRESSION TREATED?

The first step to getting the right treatment is to visit a doctor or mental health professional. He or she can do an exam or lab tests to rule out other conditions that may share the symptoms of depression. He or she can also tell if certain medications you are taking may be affecting your mood.

The doctor should get a complete history of symptoms, including when they started, how long they have lasted, and the severity of them. He or she should also know whether they have occurred before, and if so, how they were treated. He or she should also ask if there is a history of depression in your family.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR HELP?

If you are unsure where to go for help, ask your family doctor. You can also check the phone book for mental health professionals. Hospital doctors can help in an emergency.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, get help quickly.

- Call your doctor.
- Call 911 for emergency services.
- Go to the nearest hospital emergency room.
- Call the toll-free, 24-hour hotline of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255); TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889).

TAKE AN ANONYMOUS SELF-ASSESSMENT. AVAILABLE 24/7.

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