

Depression

Depression is a state of sadness and despair. Like diabetes, depression is a real medical illness. A person with depression may seek help for other problems, such as insomnia or extreme fatigue.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Feeling sad, hopeless, helpless, and/or worthless.
- Fatigue. Loss of interest in life.
- Having a hard time concentrating or making decisions.
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns.
- Feeling easily annoyed, angry, or anxious.
- Thoughts of suicide or death.

The number of symptoms and how severe they are vary from person to person.



CAUSES

Most likely, depression is caused by a mix of: A family history of the illness; brain chemical problems; emotional issues; and other factors, such as a medical illness or alcohol abuse.

Another cause is seasonal affective disorder (SAD). With this, depression occurs between late fall and early spring due to a lack of natural sunlight.

In some persons, extreme stress, trauma, grief, etc. may bring on depression. In others, depression occurs even when life is going well.

In general, depression is noted twice as often in women than in men in part due to hormonal changes women undergo:

- Premenstrually, during menopause, or when taking medicines with hormones.
- During and especially after childbirth or when a woman stops breastfeeding.
- After having a miscarriage.
- With health conditions that affect a woman's hormones, such as some ovarian cysts, endometriosis, etc.

Other life circumstances unique to women may increase risk of depression, such as cultural stressors and higher rates of sexual or physical abuse.

TREATMENT

Whatever the cause, depression can be treated. Treatment includes medication(s), counseling, and self-care measures. Exposure to bright lights similar to sunlight can treat depression caused by SAD.

A doctor should be seen for diagnosis and treatment.



TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Have you just attempted suicide or are you making plans for suicide? Do you have repeated thoughts of suicide or death?

NO

YES

▶ GET MEDICAL CARE FAST



Have you had a lot less interest or pleasure in almost all activities most of the day, nearly every day for at least 2 weeks?

NO

YES

▶ SEE DOCTOR



Have you been in a depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, and had any of these problems for at least 2 weeks?

- Feeling hopeless, worthless, or guilty, slowed down, or restless. Feeling anxious or worried.
- Changes in appetite or weight.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.
- Problems concentrating, thinking, remembering, or making decisions. Feeling tired all of the time. Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Stomach or sexual problems.

NO

YES

▶ SEE DOCTOR



Do you feel depressed and did you have depression in the past that was not treated or do you have a close relative with a history of depression? Were you treated for depression in the past and has it returned?

NO

YES

▶ SEE DOCTOR



Has the depression occurred with any of the following?

- Recently gave birth.
- A medical problem.
- Taking medicines. (This includes antidepressants.)
- Dark, cloudy weather or winter months.
- Abusing alcohol or drugs.
- Days between ovulation and menstruation (every month).

NO

YES

▶ CALL DOCTOR



USE SELF-CARE



SELF-CARE

- Take medications as prescribed. Get your doctor's advice before you take over-the-counter herbs, like St. John's Wort, especially if you take other medications.
- Don't use illegal drugs. Limit alcohol. These can cause or worsen depression. Drugs and alcohol can also make medicines for depression less effective. Harmful side effects can happen when alcohol and/or drugs are mixed with medicine.
- Eat healthy foods. Eat at regular times. Don't skip meals or binge on junk food. Limit caffeine and sugary foods.
- Try not to isolate yourself. Be with people you feel safe with even though you feel down.
- Do something you enjoy. Do things that let you express yourself. Write, paint, etc.
- Exercise regularly.
- Relax. Listen to soft music, take a warm bath or shower. Do relaxation exercises. Meditation can help you deal with depression.
- Keep an emergency number handy (e.g., crisis hotline, trusted friend's number, etc.) in case you feel desperate.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Mental Health America (MHA)
800.969.6642

[mentalhealthamerica.net](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

[mentalhealthamerica.net/
mental-health-screening-tools](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/mental-health-screening-tools)