



MDwise

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Depression

Depression is a medical illness that affects how you feel, think, and act. With depression, you may have less energy. You may lose interest in daily activities, and you may feel sad and grouchy for a long time. Depression is very common. It affects men and women of all ages.

Many depressed people do not get help because they are embarrassed or think that they will get over depression on their own. This is a mistake, because treatment works well for most people.

If you think you may have depression, talk to your doctor. Depression is not something you have to live with.

What causes depression?

Depression is caused by changes in the natural chemicals in your brain. It is not a character flaw, and it does not mean that you are a bad or weak person. It does not mean that you are going crazy.

Many different things can trigger depression. Some people become depressed after they have a stroke or find out they have a major illness like cancer or heart disease. The death of a loved one, a loss of a relationship, financial problems, or hormone problems may start a bout with depression. Depression may run in your family.



What are the symptoms?

Depression affects people differently. You may feel hopeless and sad or stop feeling pleasure from almost everything you do. You may feel "down in the dumps," tearful, or discouraged. You may also be grouchy or anxious or have low energy levels.

You may have other symptoms, such as:

- You lose or gain weight.
- You sleep too much or not enough.
- You feel restless and unable to sit still, or you feel that moving takes a great effort.
- You feel tired all the time.
- You feel unworthy or guilty without reason.
- You have problems concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.

- You think often about death or suicide.
- You feel overwhelmed.

Who gets depression?

Anyone can develop depression. Your age, race, or social status have no effect.

Can depression be treated?

Counseling and medicine usually work well to treat depression. Sometimes counseling alone is enough. Often a combination of the two works best.

You may begin to feel better within 1 to 3 weeks of starting antidepressant medicine. It can take as many as 6 to 8 weeks to see more improvement. If you have problems or concerns about your medicines, or you do not notice any improvement within 3 weeks, talk to your doctor. Try to be patient. There are many antidepressants. They work in different ways and have different side effects. You may have to try a couple of different medicines before you find the one that works best for you.

Taking your medicine for at least 6 months after you feel better can help keep you from

getting depressed again. Your doctor may want you to take these medicines even longer.

Counseling, sometimes called therapy or psychotherapy, works as well as medicines for most depression. A type of counseling called cognitive-behavioral therapy not only helps treat depression but can help stop it from coming back. In this type of therapy, you learn how to identify and change unhelpful thinking styles that may be adding to your depression. The therapy is done by licensed mental health providers, such as psychologists, social workers, and therapists. It can be done in one-on-one sessions or in a group setting. Most people find group sessions helpful, but it is up to you.

Healthy lifestyle habits such as getting regular exercise, eating well, not drinking alcohol, and getting enough sleep can also help you. Talk to your doctor about these and other ways to help yourself feel better. Ask for support from family and friends.

Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information? It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.



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