



It is normal for everyone to feel down or sad sometimes. These feelings can occur after having a bad day at work, having an argument with a loved one, or getting a bad grade on an exam. In most cases, these feelings do not last, and a person's mood improves within a few days. But a person with depression has symptoms that interfere with his or her daily life for at least two weeks.

Depression is a common and serious mental disorder. It can affect people in different ways. It can change how a person feels, thinks, acts, and handles daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, and working. People with depression may feel sad, hopeless, angry, irritable, and tired. They may have physical symptoms such as stomachaches, headaches, migraines, and muscle pains. They may have suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts.

## Signs and Symptoms

A person with depression may not realize it. The symptoms vary from person to person. Without proper treatment, the symptoms may get worse.

A person with depression will have some of the following symptoms for at least two weeks, as well as significant impact on their daily life functions:

- Sadness, anxiety, or feeling “empty” of any mood
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of pessimism, expecting only bad things to occur
- Loss of interest or pleasure in previously enjoyed hobbies and activities
- Neglecting care of oneself, such as not bathing, grooming, or eating
- Fatigue or decreased energy level, moving or speaking slowly
- Irritability
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Restlessness or having trouble sitting still
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty following through with tasks, being unable to perform well at work, or ineffective parenting
- Increase in pain sensitivity
- Difficulty sleeping, waking very early in the morning, or sleeping more than usual
- Increased or decreased appetite, large changes in the body weight
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause or that do not ease even with targeted treatment
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts

## How is it treated?

- Depression can be treated in various ways. Counseling, psychotherapy, and antidepressant medicines can all be used. Lifestyle changes, such as getting more exercise, also may help.
- Work with your health care team to find the best treatment for you. It may take a few tries, and it can take several weeks for the medicine and therapy to start working. Try to be patient and keep following your treatment plan.
- Depression can return (relapse). How likely you are to get depression again increases each time you have a bout of depression. Taking your medicines and continuing some types of therapy after you feel better can help keep that from happening. Some people need to take medicine for the rest of their lives. This doesn't stop them from living full and happy lives.

## What can you do if a loved one has depression?

### Tell the person about depression and why you are concerned

- Stress that depression is not laziness or something in the head. It's a common disease and is nothing to be embarrassed about.
- Point out the symptoms of depression that you have noticed in your family member or friend, and say why these symptoms worry you. Use a supportive and caring tone of voice while you are doing this.

### Explain why the person needs to see a health professional

- Explain that very few people get over depression on their own. Most people need some type of treatment. The sooner someone gets treatment, the sooner he or she will feel better.
- Point out that there are many types of professionals who treat depression and many types of treatment. Just because a person is depressed doesn't mean that he or she needs to see a psychologist or take medicine. A family doctor or a counselor may be able to help.
- Point out that depression might be caused by another problem. For example, many people have an underactive thyroid, which can cause symptoms of depression. A doctor can diagnose this and give the person thyroid medicine. This will stop the depression. A doctor also can tell if a medicine, such as one used for high blood pressure, might be causing depression

### Home support

A person who has depression may feel alone in the world. Your support can help.

- Listen when the person wants to talk. If you're there to help the person talk things through, it may help the person feel better or continue treatment.
- Avoid giving advice. But gently point out that not everything is bad, and offer hope. Urge the person to continue treatment. Don't tell the person that he or she is lazy or should be able to get over it.
- Keep your relationship as normal as you can, but don't pretend that depression doesn't exist or that there isn't a problem.
- Ask the person to do things with you, such as go for walks or to a movie, and encourage the person to continue with favorite activities. If the person says no, then that's okay. But be sure to ask again in the future. Don't push too much, which may make the person feel worse.
- Ask what you can do to help in daily life. You might help with housework or lawn care, getting the kids to school, or running errands.
- Don't be offended. If you are a spouse or are very close to someone, you may feel hurt because the person isn't paying attention to you and may seem angry or uncaring. Remember that your loved one still cares for you but just isn't able to show it.



## Help the person overcome fears about treatment

Many people have reasons why they don't want to see a doctor. Talk about these barriers, and help the person find solutions.

### Barriers and solutions for getting treatment for depression

Barriers	Solutions
"See a shrink? I'm not crazy." "People will think I'm weak." "What will my family and friends think?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You are looking for help so you will feel better. It takes strength and courage to seek help from others.</li> <li>You may not need to see a psychiatrist or psychologist. Your family doctor or a counselor may be able to help you.</li> <li>Mental health problems are real and can affect your physical health. They are not character flaws. They are often caused by chemicals in the brain or by heredity.</li> <li>You can get better with the right kind of treatment. Treatment includes medicine, counseling, self-care, or a combination of these. The kind of treatment you have will depend on how severe your symptoms are.</li> </ul>
"It might hurt my career."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may think that it will hurt your career if people at your workplace know that you are depressed. But depression may make it hard for you to perform your job well. Treatment can help you perform better.</li> </ul>
"I've had counseling before and didn't like it."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn about treatment for depression, and find someone you feel comfortable with. If you don't connect with one doctor or counselor, try another one.</li> </ul>
"Aren't medicines for depression addictive?" "These medicines make you crazy or uninterested in sex."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Medicines for depression are not addictive.</li> <li>Medicines for depression have side effects, and some affect sexual desire. If you're worried about side effects, your doctor can find medicines with fewer or different side effects or can change your dose.</li> </ul>
"Someone might get into my medical records and see this."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doctors, counselors, hospitals, and clinics take privacy seriously. They won't share your records with anyone who's not involved in your treatment. If you have questions about your privacy, ask the doctor about it when you call for an appointment.</li> </ul>
"It's hard to schedule and find time for an appointment." "I can't get there."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look at your schedule, and find when it would be easiest for you to see a doctor. Ask for this time when you call.</li> <li>When you call for an appointment, explain your situation. Most doctors will try to find a time that works for both of you.</li> <li>Ask a friend to help you get there, or check local bus schedules.</li> </ul>
"I've tried to talk to people. They just don't get it and don't care."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It may be hard for some people to understand depression. But other people who have been through depression can understand. Consider finding a support group of people with similar experiences.</li> </ul>
"I can't afford it."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many towns and cities have resources that may be able to help you. Call your local social services department or welfare office to find out.</li> <li>If you have insurance, check your policy. Mental health benefits often are covered through a separate company.</li> <li>Ask your doctor for help. He or she may be able to find free or low-cost medicine or counseling.</li> <li>Check Medicaid if you have a low income. Check Medicare if you are 65 or older. These programs may be able to help you.</li> <li>Some universities, hospitals, and other institutions may have training programs and may offer reduced fees.</li> </ul>