10 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DEPRESSION
Depression is not just about being sad.*

We all feel sad or down once in a while. These feelings lessen with time and go away. Depression is different. You can’t just snap out of it or “pull yourself together.” Unlike temporary feelings of sadness, depression can cause someone to feel sad every day for weeks at a time. They may also have aches and pains and other symptoms that won’t go away. A majority of people with depression report their symptoms disrupt most areas of their life.

Depression is a common illness. Many people have it. Your doctor or other health care professional can tell you if you have depression. The good news is – depression is treatable.

Do you think you or a loved one might have depression? Please look through this booklet. If you have any questions, talk to your doctor. And get the help you need.

* This brochure is meant to help you learn more about depression. It doesn’t tell you everything. Talk with your doctor about depression and ways to manage it.
What causes depression?

No single cause of depression has been identified. But it does appear that a combination of genetic, biochemical, environmental, and psychological factors play a role. For example, research does show that depression is a disorder of the brain, in the way it functions and as a result of chemical imbalances.

Though anyone can get depression, some types of depression seem to run in families. Episodes of depression may also be triggered by a stressful life event such as death of a loved one or money problems. In some cases, depression may occur with no obvious cause.

Depression is a medical condition

Depression is a serious medical condition. Most people with depression need treatment to get better. And like other medical conditions, the earlier treatment begins the more effective it is. Unfortunately, many people with depression don’t get treatment. Without treatment symptoms may last longer and get worse over time.

If you have depression, do not feel ashamed. It is not a sign of personal weakness. In fact, people who deal with their depression show they have a lot of strength. With treatment you can get better. Don’t just hope it will go away.
Many people have depression

If you have depression, you are not alone. An estimated 33 to 35 million adults in the United States have experienced major depression disorder at some point during their lifetime. In the past year alone, about 1 in 13 adults had at least one episode of major depression. The disease can affect men and women of all ages, races, and economic levels. Research shows that depression occurs almost twice as often in women than in men.

There are several forms of depression. They include:

**Major depression** – This is one of the most common forms of depression. It disrupts a person’s ability to function normally. Working, sleeping, eating, and enjoying pleasurable activities are more difficult.

**Dysthymic disorder** – With dysthymic disorder the symptoms may be less severe, but they can last a long time (2 years or longer). This is another common form of depression. It is sometimes called chronic depression.

**Psychotic depression** – This occurs when a person with severe depression also has a form of psychosis. Symptoms can include hallucinations, delusions, and a break from reality.

**Postpartum depression** – This type of depression is diagnosed when a new mother has an episode of major depression within a month of giving birth. It is a more serious form of depression than the brief mood changes or “baby blues” some women get.

**Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)** – SAD can occur during the winter months when there is less sunlight. Generally, it goes away during spring and summer.

**Bipolar disorder** – Also called manic-depressive illness, this form of depression is characterized by extreme mood changes from high (i.e., mania) to low (i.e., depression).
Depression can occur with other medical conditions

People with chronic conditions commonly have depression also. For some, having to face a serious illness leads to symptoms of depression. In other cases, having depression can lead to another illness or poor overall health. This occurs in part because many people don’t take care of themselves when they feel depressed. For example, they may smoke, drink too much alcohol, be physically inactive, or eat an unhealthy diet.

Conditions that may occur with depression include:

- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Cancer
- HIV/AIDS
- Diabetes
- Parkinson’s disease
- Multiple sclerosis

Tell your doctor if you have one of these medical conditions or another illness. Depression can make symptoms of your condition worse and harder to treat. Your depression symptoms may also become more severe. It’s important that both conditions be diagnosed and treated.
Could you have signs of depression?

The signs and symptoms of depression can vary from person to person and with different forms of depression. How severe your symptoms are, how often you have them, and how long they last can also differ.

The two most common signs that point to depression are persistent sadness or “empty” feelings and loss of interest or pleasure in nearly all activities.

Other symptoms include:

- Irritability, restlessness
- Hopelessness and/or pessimism
- Trouble sleeping (insomnia) or sleeping too much
- Low energy or fatigue
- Feeling worthless, guilty or helpless
- Changes in weight or appetite
- Trouble concentrating, remembering details, or making decisions
- Persistent aches and pains that do not ease when treated
- Thoughts of suicide or attempted suicide

Tell your doctor or other health care professional if you are experiencing any of these symptoms. Be open and let him or her know if your symptoms are affecting your ability to function— at home, at work, or with your family, friends, and colleagues.

When to get help right away

If you are thinking about hurting yourself or you know someone who is, get help right away. Call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room. You could also call a toll-free suicide prevention hotline. Ask a friend or family member to assist you. People thinking about suicide should not be left alone.
Depression often occurs with anxiety disorders

Depression and anxiety disorders often occur together. One study reported that more than 50 percent of adults with depression also had an anxiety disorder. The symptoms of anxiety disorders vary but they are all based upon excessive, irrational fear and dread. If not treated, anxiety disorders can get worse.

Anxiety disorders which can occur with depression include:

- Panic disorder
- Social anxiety disorder (also called social phobia)
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Generalized anxiety disorder

In some cases, depression or other mental illnesses can mask symptoms of anxiety.

To learn if you have both depression and an anxiety disorder, your doctor should give you a complete check-up. He or she can then decide what type of treatment is right for you. Some types of depression medicines are used treat anxiety disorders. Your doctor may also decide to wait and treat your anxiety disorder after your depression symptoms are under control.
Your doctor can help you take care of your depression

If you are feeling depressed, it’s very important that you visit your doctor. Your doctor will talk with you and get details about your symptoms, your medical history, and any family history of depression. He or she may also give you a physical exam to determine if another medical condition is causing your symptoms.

If you are diagnosed with depression, you and your doctor can work together to decide what type of treatment is best for you. There are many options to choose from.

The most common treatments for depression are medication and psychotherapy or “talk therapy.” Talk therapy can help you understand and deal with the things that cause your depression or make it worse. For some, talk therapy alone can treat their depression. For others a combination of talk therapy and medication is most effective.
Will medicine help to treat my depression?

Medications, called antidepressants, are often used to treat symptoms of depression. They work by helping correct imbalances of chemicals in the brain. These chemicals are called neurotransmitters. They affect our mood and emotions.

To get the most from treatment, it’s important that you work closely with your doctor or other health care professional. If your doctor prescribes medicine for you, take it exactly as directed. This includes taking the right dose for the right amount of time. Antidepressants can take several weeks before they take full effect.

Here are more steps you can take to work with your doctor or health care professional in treating your depression:

- Do not stop taking your medicine without letting your doctor know, even if you feel better. If you do, your depression could return.

- Ask your doctor about possible side effects and what to do about them. Side effects from antidepressants are usually mild and do not last long. However, it’s important that you report any unusual side effects right away.

- If a medication doesn’t seem to be working for you, don’t give up hope. Be open to trying another. Studies show that people with depression increased their chance of getting better when they tried another medication or added a second one to their treatment plan.

- Keep your doctor informed about how you are responding to treatment. Always let him or her know if you experience new symptoms of depression, or if your symptoms get worse.

- Be patient. Depending on how long you’ve had depression or how severe your symptoms are, it may take time for you to get better. Some people need their medication for a short time, others for a long time.
Your friends and family can help you

Depression is a real medical condition. But your family and friends may not understand what it’s like to experience depression.

Help your family and friends learn more about depression. Explain that depression is not the same as a passing blue mood. It’s not something you can “just snap out of.” Describe your symptoms and experiences with depression. Let them know that to be diagnosed, your symptoms must meet strict criteria defined by the American Psychiatric Association. And for many, depression must be treated with the help of a doctor or mental health professional.

The support of family and friends can be very helpful to you as you get better. They can:

- Help you get a proper diagnosis and treatment
- Provide you with emotional support and understanding
- Encourage you to stick with your treatment plan as directed by your doctor or other health care professional
- Help you schedule appointments with your doctor or other health care professional, then go with you to those appointments
- Be there for you when you need to talk
- Invite you out for walks and other activities you once enjoyed
- Offer you hope that your symptoms will improve with time and treatment

You can learn how to deal with depression

Dealing with depression is hard. It may be the biggest challenge you’ve ever faced. But your depression can be treated successfully.

Many people have gotten better. And beating depression has helped them realize just how strong they can be.

You can get your life back. Talk with your doctor. Start to treat your depression now.
Search the Web for more information

If you get on the Internet, you might want to visit some of these Web sites. They can give you more information about depression:

2. Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance: http://www.DBSAliance.org
3. HealthyMinds.org: http://www.healthyminds.org
4. National Alliance on Mental Illness (formerly the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill): http://www.nami.org
6. Mental Health America (formerly the National Mental Health Association): http://www.nmha.org

References


