



Depression



Depression can range from feeling a little sad, with mild “ups and downs,” to severe levels that may include major disruptions in functioning, and perhaps thoughts of suicide. Telling a person who is depressed, “Hey, just pull yourself together,” usually doesn’t work. It’s best to learn and put to use the various skills that will help to lessen depression, and not assume that time alone will take care of things.

Signs of Depression

There are many signs of low mood and depression. Depression may last for weeks or months, and if not treated may even last for years. Low mood and depression can affect a person’s physical health, thoughts, actions, and feelings. People who are feeling down or depressed can suffer from any of the following signs.

Physical Health

- Decreased energy, fatigue or tiredness, feeling “slowed down” or sluggish.
- Physical problems that don’t get better with treatment, such as headaches, stomach problems, and chronic pain.
- Losing or gaining weight due to an unhealthy diet or lack of exercise.

Thoughts

- Thoughts of death or suicide.
- Hopelessness, excessive pessimism.
- Thoughts of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness.
- Negative thoughts about oneself, the world, and the future that repeat again and again.
- Problems paying attention and focusing.
- Memory problems.
- Being confused, finding it hard to make everyday decisions.
- Poor judgment.
- Having a hard time slowing down racing thoughts.
- Harshly criticizing oneself or thinking, “I’m a loser.”



Behaviors

- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in sex.
- Having a hard time getting started with activities.
- Pulling away or isolating from others, wanting to be alone.
- Increasing use of tobacco, alcohol, caffeine, or other drugs.
- Taking dangerous risks.
- Laughing or crying at odd moments.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Eating more or less than usual.



Depression

Mood

- Always feeling sad, down, or "empty."
- Feeling restless, annoyed, anxious, or nervous.
- Feeling anger, guilt, or regret.

You may be suffering from depression if some or several of the signs listed above:

- Occur together, for example decreased energy **and** decreased appetite **and** sleep difficulty **and** poor concentration.
- Last longer than two weeks.
- Are very bothersome or are causing a lot of distress.
- Get in the way of social, work and family duties or other important activities.

When this is the case, seek professional consultation with a primary care physician or mental health professional. Keep in mind that a diagnosis of depression is best determined by a professional provider.

Factors that Contribute to or Worsen Depression

Depression can seem to happen "out of the blue," with no specific cause. A person can get depressed even if everything seems to be going well. Many things can contribute to depression including:

- Dwelling on negative automatic thoughts about oneself, the world, and the future (*such as job loss, divorce, illness or injury, and trauma*).
- History of feeling bad about oneself.
- Changes in brain chemicals.
- Using alcohol and/or illegal drugs to avoid or cope with emotional pain.
- Use of certain prescribed and over-the-counter drugs (*always discuss possible side-effects of medications with a physician*).
- The important role of family history and genetics.
- Medical conditions, such as hypothyroidism, diabetes, or brain injury.
- Anxiety disorders or other psychological problems.
- Combat experience.
- Threat of death.
- Death of another person or other major loss.
- Physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse.
- A long period of stress at home and/or work.
- Relationship problems or divorce.
- Money problems.
- Job loss.
- Natural or man-made disasters.



The good news is that no matter what causes or contributes to depression, depression can be resolved with appropriate treatment.