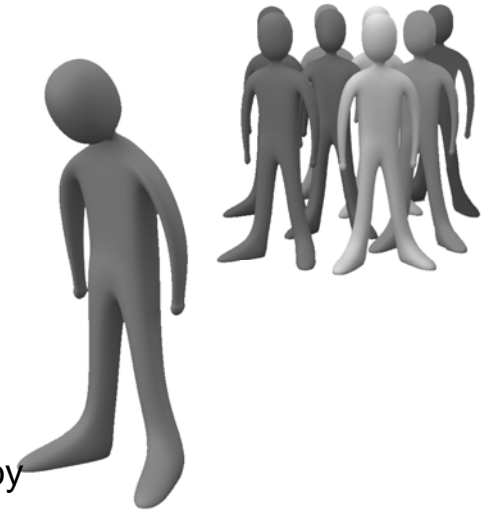


Understanding Depression

What are the signs of depression?

If you have felt many of these symptoms nearly every day for two weeks or longer, you may have clinical depression, not just common sadness:

- Depressed mood: feeling sad, tearful, irritable, or easily angered
- Little interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy
- Increase or decrease in appetite or weight
- Sleeping much more or much less than usual
- Restlessness or decreased activity
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Persistent negative thoughts



Sometimes depression can manifest as anxiety, with symptoms such as:

- Trouble sleeping
- Tense feelings
- Preoccupation with unpleasant or irrational worries
- Fear that something awful might happen

Depression is treatable. The first step is to seek help.

Please talk to us.

What causes depression?

Depression is not a sign that you are weak. Depression is a common, treatable and serious medical condition. Depression is usually the result of several factors, such as:

Stressful events: such as job loss, financial strain, conflict in a relationship, death of a loved one. Stresses may be recent or may build gradually.

Family history: depression is more common in people who have close relatives with depression.

Medical conditions: pain, chronic disease, loss of function, or other illness can lead to depression, as can hormone changes, such as during menstrual cycles, post partum and menopause.

How is depression evaluated?

Your doctor may ask you to complete a screening questionnaire. Then he or she should ask questions to check for medical illness, family history, use of alcohol and other substances, and other concerns.

How is depression treated?

Some or all of the following steps may be appropriate, depending on your own wishes and the severity of your depression. Discuss these options with your doctor.

1. Lifestyle changes are recommended for all people with depression, including:

- Exercising regularly
- Healthy eating
- Making time for pleasurable activities
- Setting a routine sleep pattern
- Avoiding alcohol and other “recreational” drugs
- Spending time with friends and loved ones

2. Regular meetings with doctors and a psychotherapist:

- Seeing your primary care doctor regularly: this plus lifestyle changes may lift mild depression
- Meeting with a therapist for “talk” therapy regularly
- Meeting with a psychiatrist for “talk” therapy and/or medication

3. Anti depressant medication: Please discuss with your doctor the risk and benefits of medication, how to take and adjust doses and manage side effects. Regular follow up with your doctor is important.

4. Involve your family and close friends: support and encouragement of loved ones can be very helpful.

Following through with treatment

- It is very important for you to come to every appointment with your doctor and therapist.
- If your doctor has prescribed an anti depressant medication, take it as directed. If you have concerns or side effects, discuss them with your doctor; don't just stop take the medication on your own.

Other resources for information

- National Institutes of Health: Depression website
(<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>)
- <http://www.pamf.org/healtheducation/>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention; www.afsp.org

If you feel severely depressed or have persistent thoughts of death or of harming yourself, please seek help immediately. Call your doctor promptly. For urgent needs, call 911.