



depression  connect  
*Symptoms, Treatments, and Solutions*



# YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE WITH DEPRESSION

It's normal to feel down from time to time, but if you find that your slumps last longer than a few days or interfere with your daily life, you may be suffering from depression—and you're not alone. As many as 14 million Americans suffer from depression each year.

Depression is not something you can “snap out of.” But there is help. This guide is designed to give you the information you need as you discuss your feelings, symptoms, and treatment options with your medical professionals, friends, and family.

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Simply put, a depressive disorder is defined as feelings of sadness, despair, or hopelessness that last more than two weeks and interferes with your daily life. It's thought to be caused by an imbalance of chemicals in the brain, along with other factors.

Most people who have experienced one episode of depression will experience another episode. A

sobering fact is that most people who suffer from depression never seek help, even though this disorder is highly treatable—even severe depression can be treated.

Learning to recognize the symptoms of a depressive episode—as well as how it can be treated—can help to prevent depression from overshadowing your day-to-day life.

# SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Commonly, the symptoms of depression can affect all areas of your life—home, work, relationships, health. If you are feeling any of the following, let your doctor or medical professional know—this is important to help them determine whether you are suffering from depression, and how severe your depression is.

## SOME OF THE SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION ARE:

- ✦ Persistent feelings of sorrow, hopelessness, or anxiety
- ✦ Change in appetite
- ✦ Loss of interest in usual activities or hobbies
- ✦ Difficulty sleeping, or sleeping too much
- ✦ Loss of focus
- ✦ Exhaustion
- ✦ Thoughts of suicide or death
- ✦ Persistent aches and pains, headaches, or digestive problems that do not subside, even with treatment

## TYPES OF DEPRESSION

Although the two most common types of depression are Major Depressive Disorder and Dysthymic Disorder, there are many different forms of depression. Your doctor can help to determine which type of depression you are suffering from.

**Some of the types of depression include:**

**Major Depressive Disorder.** The most common type of depression, Major Depressive Disorder is characterized by unrelenting symptoms that interfere with an individual's ability to work, sleep, eat, and enjoy activities.

**Dysthymic Disorder.** Also common, symptoms of Dysthymic Disorder are typically less severe than with Major Depressive Disorder, but persist over a long period of time (typically two years or longer). Individuals with Dysthymia typically find they suffer from symptoms for a period of time, followed by a period where their depression seems to abate, before returning yet again.

**Postpartum Depression.** This type of depression can occur in new mothers within one month of delivery. It is estimated that 10 to 15 percent of women experience postpartum depression.

**Seasonal Affective Disorder.** SAD is a form of depression that occurs during the winter months, and typically lifts during the spring and summer.

Commonly, Bipolar Disorder is mistaken as a form of depression. In fact, Bipolar Disorder is actually a mood disorder characterized by rapidly-cycling mood changes from extreme highs to extreme lows. If you feel you or someone you love may be suffering from Bipolar Disorder, contact your doctor or medical professional immediately.

# DIAGNOSING DEPRESSION

Depression is a highly treatable disorder, even in the most severe cases. The first step to getting treatment is to talk to a doctor or medical professional. Your doctor will conduct a complete diagnostic evaluation to determine whether you are suffering from depression, and how severe your depression is.

## TO HELP WITH YOUR DIAGNOSIS YOUR DOCTOR WILL:

**Take a complete family history.** Individuals with a family history of depression are more likely to develop depression themselves.

**Record your history of symptoms.** Your doctor will want to know when your symptoms started, how long they have lasted, how severe they are, and whether they have been treated in the past.

**Talk to you about your life experiences.** It's not always comfortable to talk about yourself and your feelings, but it's important that you share with your doctor any traumatic experiences and events that may have occurred in your life.

In addition, your doctor will need to know if you are currently using alcohol or drugs, and whether (and how often) you may be thinking about suicide or death.

## DO I HAVE DEPRESSION?

Only a medical professional can determine whether you are suffering from depression. To help out in your conversations with your doctor, ask yourself these 10 questions. If you answer yes to any of them, you might be suffering from depression.

**For longer than two weeks, have you:**

1. Felt sad, blue, or unhappy?
2. Felt tired, worn down, or unfocused?
3. Felt uneasy or anxious?
4. Had trouble sleeping or eating normally?
5. Struggled to enjoy activities which used to interest you?
6. Lost interest in sex?
7. Felt more indecisive than normal?
8. Experienced feelings of inadequacy or shame?
9. Felt guilty without a rational reason?
10. Worried that things will go wrong no matter how hard you try?

## CO-EXISTING CONDITIONS FOR DEPRESSION

It is very common for individuals suffering from depression to suffer from other illnesses or conditions, including:

- Anxiety disorders
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Cancer
- Diabetes

These co-existing conditions can precede the depression, cause it, or be a consequence of it. No matter how it occurs, research has shown that treating depression can also help improve the success of treating the co-existing condition.

# TREATING DEPRESSION

Depression is a highly treatable disorder and many treatments are available for depression. It's important that you are an active participant in your treatment plan—determining which treatment is right for you is a conversation you should have with your doctor, taking into account your medical and personal history, lifestyle, and severity of your symptoms.

## SOME OF THE AVAILABLE TREATMENTS FOR DEPRESSION INCLUDE:

**Medication** is a common treatment for Depression; however, medication is most effective as a treatment when it is combined with some form of therapy. Generally, the prescribing of medication is handled in an ordered fashion, depending on your history of treatment, the severity of your symptoms, and the effectiveness of the medications in easing your depression.

It's important not to get discouraged if the medication your doctor prescribes doesn't work immediately for you. It's fairly common to have to make adjustments to medications and dosage. Your doctor will continue to work with you

until you find the medication or combination of medications that is right for controlling your depression.

Many times the side effects of anti-depressants can also be discouraging. Do not stop taking your medication, or change the way you are taking it, without talking to your doctor first. Often doing this can cause far more serious effects than the side effects you're experiencing. Your doctor wants to help—talk with him or her about what you're experiencing, and together you can develop a plan to address your particular situation.

TYPE OF MEDICATION	WHEN IT'S PRESCRIBED AND WHAT IT DOES
<b>Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRI)</b>	<b>First Choice</b> - Treatment often starts with SSRIs because the side effects tend to be more tolerable than other types of anti-depressants
<b>Tricyclic Anti-depressants (TCAs)</b>	<b>Second Choice</b> - Typically prescribed if SSRIs have proven ineffective because the side effects tend to be more severe than with SSRIs.
<b>Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOIs)</b>	<b>Last Choice</b> - MAOIs are generally very effective but are often a last choice because many have serious harmful side effects and require strict dietary restrictions.

## PSYCHOTHERAPY

Another key treatment for Depression is therapy, and is often employed along with medication.

In therapy, your doctor will talk with you about your thought patterns, history, and other key parts of your life to help you regain a sense of happiness and control in your life.

## HOSPITALIZATION AND RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT

Inpatient therapy for depression is not common, but in severe cases it can become necessary.

Psychiatric hospitalization is only recommended when you aren't able to care for yourself properly or if you are in immediate danger of harming yourself or others. Residential treatment is a positive step toward recovery in these severe cases, offering a supportive and safe place to live while you recover.

## WHERE CAN I GO FOR HELP?

It's important to reach out for help if you're feeling depressed. Because it is such a common disorder, it's likely that those around you have felt the way you are feeling and will be able to empathize as they assist you in getting help. Talk to a family member or friend, or contact your doctor.

### Other places you can find help include:

- ✦ Mental health specialists—if you don't immediately know how to find one, try looking on the Internet or in the phone book for “mental health services,” “social services,” or “physicians.”
- ✦ Clergy—if you're a member of a church, turn to your spiritual leaders.

- ✦ Community mental health centers—your doctor can refer you to several available centers in your area

If you're still unsure or don't have a primary care physician, an emergency room doctor can provide temporary help and can tell you where and how to get further help.

## WHAT IF I OR SOMEONE I KNOW IS IN CRISIS?

If you're thinking about harming yourself or if you know someone who is, get help immediately. Make sure that the suicidal person is not left alone.

### Some options to get help:

- ✦ Call your doctor.
- ✦ Call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room. If you are unable to do so yourself, get a family member or friend to help you.
- ✦ Call the toll-free, 24-hour hotline of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK to talk to a trained counselor. The call is free and confidential. TTY is also available at 1-800-799-4TTY.