

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DEPRESSION

In the Clinic
Annals of Internal Medicine

What Is Depression?

Depression is a common mood disorder that causes feelings of sadness or emptiness. It may make it hard to enjoy regular activities and can cause problems in your life. It is different from feeling down for a few days because it does not go away. Untreated depression can last for months or years and may worsen other medical problems.

What Causes It?

Depression affects 5%-10% of the U.S. population, and everyone is at risk. People with chronic medical conditions, a personal or family history of depression, or lower socioeconomic status have a higher risk for depression during their lifetime.

Having some of these symptoms every day for at least 2 weeks may indicate depression:

- Sadness
- Feeling less interested in things you used to enjoy
- Changes in appetite
- Unintentional weight loss or gain
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling tired
- Feeling guilty or worthless
- Trouble concentrating
- Thoughts of death or suicide

How Is It Diagnosed?

- You may be asked to complete a short survey that asks questions about your mood, your behavior, and how often you experience feelings of depression.
- Your doctor will review the results of the survey with you and ask follow-up questions about your feelings and if you are having suicidal thoughts. He or she may also ask if you have access to firearms.
- Your doctor will ask about your medical history, including any history of mania/hypomania, anxiety, substance use disorder, and psychosis. You will also have a physical examination.
- Your doctor will review medicines you are taking and ask about other substances you use.

How Is It Treated?

- There are many available treatments that work alone or in combination. You and your doctor will work together to identify the best plan for you. It may take 1-2 months before you start to feel better on whatever treatment you select.
- You may be referred for psychotherapy, which involves talking with a therapist to help you change your thoughts and behaviors and



improve your ability to cope. This can be as effective as medication for mild or moderate depression and may better prevent relapse.

- You may be prescribed an antidepressant medicine. The type will depend on how severe your depression is and your symptoms.
- It is important to know the side effects of the medication and to notify your doctor before stopping any medication because of side effects. Side effects are usually most severe in the first few weeks and improve over time. They differ between antidepressants, so it is easy to switch medications if you are having trouble.
- If you do not feel better after 2 months of treatment, talk to your doctor and adjust the plan.
- Treatment should last for at least 4-9 months to prevent relapse.
- See your doctor for regular follow-up and ongoing monitoring during treatment.
- Self-care strategies like yoga, self-help books, exercise, relaxation therapy, acupuncture, and light therapy may also help your depression.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. If you feel you may harm yourself or need help, call 911 or go to the emergency department right away.

Questions for My Doctor

- How do I know if I'm depressed or just sad?
- Do I need medicine to treat my depression?
- What are the side effects of the medication?
- What should I do if I have side effects?
- How long does it take for the medication to work?
- Do alternative therapies help with depression?
- Can you help me find a therapist who takes my insurance?
- Should I see a psychiatrist?
- Can I take antidepressants if I am pregnant or planning to become pregnant?
- What should I do if treatment does not make me feel better?

For More Information



American College of Physicians
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National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression/index.shtml

MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/depression.html>