



# DEPRESSION

## Let's talk about it

Depression is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how someone feels, thinks, and handles daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working.

Not everyone who is depressed experiences every symptom. Some people experience only a few symptoms while others may experience many.

## What is Depression?

Everyone feels sad or low sometimes, but these feelings usually pass with a little time. Depression (also called major depressive disorder or clinical depression) is different. It can cause severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working. It is an illness that can affect anyone—regardless of age, race, income, culture, or education. Research suggests that genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological factors play a role in depression.

Depression may occur with other mental disorders and other illnesses, such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and chronic pain. Depression can make these conditions worse, and vice versa. Sometimes medications taken for these illnesses cause side effects that contribute to depression symptoms.

## How is it Treated?

Depression treatment typically involves medication, psychotherapy, or both. If these treatments do not reduce symptoms, brain stimulation therapy may be another treatment option.

In milder cases of depression, treatment might begin with psychotherapy alone, and medication added if the individual continues to experience symptoms.

For moderate or severe depression, many mental health professionals recommend a combination of medication and therapy at the start of treatment.

## Signs & Symptoms

People with Depression may experience:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of irritability, frustration, or restlessness
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies or activities
- Decreased energy, fatigue, or being “slowed down”
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Changes in appetite or unplanned weight changes
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and that do not ease even with treatment
- Suicide attempts or thoughts of death or suicide

## Types of Depression

Two common forms of depression are:

Major depression, which includes symptoms of depression most of the time for at least 2 weeks that typically interfere with one’s ability to work, sleep, study, and eat.

Persistent depressive disorder (dysthymia), which often includes less severe symptoms of depression that last much longer, typically for at least 2 years.

Other forms of depression also include: Perinatal depression, Seasonal affective disorder, and depression with symptoms of psychosis.

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## How is it diagnosed?

To be diagnosed with depression, an individual must have five depression symptoms every day, nearly all day, for at least 2 weeks. One of the symptoms must be a depressed mood or a loss of interest or pleasure in almost all activities. Children and adolescents may be irritable rather than sad.

If you think you may have depression, talk to your health care provider. Primary care providers routinely diagnose and treat depression and refer individuals to mental health professionals, such as psychologists or psychiatrists.

During the visit, your provider may ask when your symptoms began, how long they last, how often they occur, and if they keep you from going out or doing your usual activities. It may help to make some notes about your symptoms before your visit. Certain medications and some medical conditions, such as viruses or a thyroid disorder, can cause the same depression symptoms. Your provider can rule out these possibilities by doing a physical exam, interview, and lab tests.

## Does it look the same in everyone?

Depression can affect people differently, depending on their age.

Children with depression may be anxious, cranky, pretend to be sick, refuse to go to school, cling to a parent, or worry that a parent may die.

Older children and teens with depression may get into trouble at school, sulk, be easily frustrated, feel restless, or have low self-esteem. They also may have other disorders, such as anxiety and eating disorders, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, or substance use disorder. Older children and teens are more likely to experience excessive sleepiness (called hypersomnia) and increased appetite (called hyperphagia). In adolescence, females begin to experience depression more often than males, likely due to the biological, life cycle, and hormonal factors unique to women.

Younger adults with depression are more likely to be irritable, complain of weight gain and hypersomnia, and have a negative view of life and the future. They often have other disorders, such as generalized anxiety disorder, social phobia, panic disorder, and substance use disorders.

Middle-aged adults with depression may have more depressive episodes, decreased libido, middle-of-the-night insomnia, or early morning awakening. They also may more frequently report having gastrointestinal symptoms such as diarrhea or constipation.

Older adults with depression commonly experience sadness or grief or may have other less obvious symptoms. They may report a lack of emotions rather than a depressed mood. Older adults also are more likely to have other medical conditions or pain that may cause or contribute to depression. In severe cases, memory and thinking problems (called pseudodementia) may be prominent.

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Source: National Institute of Mental Health