

DEPRESSION

Depression is a serious medical illness. There are three types of depressive illness:

- Major Depressive Disorder
- Dysthymia
- Bipolar disorder

Though many people may experience a “down mood” from time to time like feelings of sadness, loss, or grief, depression can last for long periods of time, can interfere with your ability to perform at work or school, and can be devastating to relationships. Women are twice as likely as men to be affected by depression. No one knows the exact cause of depression, but it may be related to an excess or lack of certain brain chemicals known as *neurotransmitters* (serotonin and norepinephrine); negative thoughts, low self-esteem, or excessive worry; a family history of depression; *life changing events* (death of loved one, divorce, loss of job, or money problems), associated *medical conditions* (stroke, heart disease, cancer, Parkinson’s disease, Alzheimer’s disease, or diabetes); or certain medication side effects. Many people do not receive treatment because they may not recognize the disorder, or they are discouraged to seek treatment due to shame or stigma.

Symptoms may include:

Major Depressive Disorder - 5+ symptoms during the same 2-week period

- Constant depressed mood throughout the day
- Lack or loss of interest in hobbies or other pleasurable activities
- Changes in weight and appetite
- Insomnia (difficulty sleeping) or excessive sleeping
- Excessive tiredness and decreased energy
- Unusual guilt and excessive feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, or helplessness
- Difficulty with thinking clearly, making decisions or concentrating
- Anxiety or slowing of physical movements
- Chronic thoughts of death or suicide

Dysthymia - Less severe form of depression

- Depressed mood lasting at least 2 years (1 year in children)
- 2 of the symptoms listed in Major Depressive Disorder

Bipolar Disorder - Alternating depression with mania

- Depression phase - Major Depressive disorder symptoms
- Mania phase - Abnormally elevated mood, irritability, agitation, inflated self-esteem, unusual risk taking, easily distracted, decreased need for sleep, excessive talkativeness, racing thoughts

What your doctor can do:

- Diagnose the condition by asking about your symptoms, doing a physical exam, performing a mental status exam, and possibly ordering laboratory tests.
- Prescribe an anti-depressant medication specifically for your condition from the following medication groups tricyclics (TCAs), selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), or others.
- Recommend counseling, psychotherapy, and/or behavior therapies for mild depression and in combination with anti-depressant medicine for severe depression.

- Order hospital treatment of severe depression including electroconvulsive therapy (mild electrical brain stimulation to correct mood disorder).

What you can do:

- Notify your doctor if you notice symptoms of depression as soon as possible.
- Take the anti-depressant medication as directed by your doctor.
- DO NOT stop taking your medicine or change the dose without talking to your doctor.
- Remember that medication therapy may take up to several weeks or months to begin to control the depression.
- Continue with counseling, psychotherapy or behavior therapy programs as directed.
- Talk to your doctor about the benefits of an exercise program and diet changes.
- Avoid foods with excessive caffeine and alcoholic beverages. They may worsen your symptoms or the side effects of anti-depressant medications.
- DO NOT take any other medication, medications of friends or relatives, or herbal supplements without talking to your doctor. These medicines may interfere with the effectiveness of the anti-depressants, may worsen your symptoms, or may cause severe and even fatal side effects.
- Keep a diary of your moods and share it with your doctor.

What you can expect:

- Treatment and lifestyle changes generally can bring depression under control within a few weeks.
- Complications of depression may include lifestyle disruptions like poor school or work performance, relationship problems, and drug or alcohol abuse.
- Lack of treatment or poor treatment may lead to worsening of symptoms and maybe even suicide.
- A small percentage of people may develop chronic depression.

Contact your doctor if you are experiencing symptoms of depression, or if your symptoms are no better despite receiving treatment.

SEEK immediate medical attention if you have thoughts of harming yourself such as suicidal thoughts!