

What is Depression?

Depression is a medical condition that causes persistent feelings of sadness or irritability and a loss of interest in things and activities you once enjoyed.

Depressed feelings happen to everyone sometimes. Everyone feels down sometimes, especially after a loss or disappointment. When these feelings last for more than a couple of weeks and get in the way of doing things you want or need to do, it is important to get help so that you can live the life you want to live.

Depression can make you feel stuck, but it's possible to feel like yourself again with the right coping plan.

Depression is a very common mental health problem—**5–10% of children have a major depressive episode.**

— Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Causes of Depression

Many factors can contribute to the development of depression, including:

- **Stressful life events:** Depression often starts after a big loss, trauma, or life change. Stressful life events like the death of a loved one, a divorce, a move to a new area, or a breakup with a partner can bring on great sadness or other unwanted feelings. Having a hard time coping with these events can lead to depression.
- **Brain chemistry:** Sometimes depression seems to come out of nowhere. Certain chemical imbalances in the brain may contribute to the onset of depression symptoms.
- **Genetics:** Depression sometimes runs in families. Someone with a close relative who has depression may be more likely to experience depression.
- **Medical conditions:** Having a hard time treating or coping with chronic illness or chronic pain can lead to symptoms of depression.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

Thoughts

- Thinking poorly of yourself
- Thinking things can't change, are pointless, or that nothing is good enough
- Dwelling on negative thoughts
- Thinking others can't or won't understand what you're going through
- Slow thinking, difficulty making decisions and remembering things
- Wishing to be dead or thoughts of killing oneself

Feelings

- Feeling sadness, worthlessness, guilt, despair, hopelessness
- Feeling lonely and misunderstood
- Feeling irritable or getting angry easily
- Feeling bored or frequently tired, having no energy or motivation
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Not caring about things you used to care about
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Physical aches and pains such as headaches or stomach aches

Behavior

- Difficulty sleeping, sleeping too much
- Spending less time with friends or people who care about you
- Crying more than usual
- Not doing things you used to enjoy, not being physically active
- Noticeable changes in appetite or weight
- Trouble going to school
- Using alcohol or substances
- Hurting self on purpose, attempting suicide

When to Get Help for Depression

If the feelings, thoughts, or behaviors associated with depression last longer than usual and get in the way of life, then seeking help is important.

Depression can lead people to think about taking more risks or acting dangerously. If you are thinking about making a dangerous or impulsive decision, tell a trusted adult now.

Get help right away if...

- You are thinking about killing yourself or you wish to be dead
- You are doing things on purpose to hurt yourself
- You are drinking and taking drugs to block out negative feelings

Sometimes depression comes back, so part of therapy is learning the warning signs and having a plan for if this happens.

If you are struggling to cope and stay safe, your provider will help you create a specific plan to help keep you safe.

If it's an option, you might find it helpful for a parent or other trusted adult to be part of therapy. They can encourage you to use your new coping skills and to generate more helpful thoughts and behaviors

Treatment for Depression

1. **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT):** CBT is a temporary, problem-focused therapy that teaches how to change unhelpful thoughts, learn new behaviors, and build coping skills.
2. **Interpersonal therapy (IPT):** IPT is a temporary, problem-focused therapy that focuses on patterns of interactions with other people and teaches more positive ways to have relationships and friendships.
3. **Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT):** DBT is a temporary therapy based on CBT and designed to provide skills for managing intense emotions and navigating social relationships.
4. **Antidepressant medicine:** These medicines work on the brain to improve your emotional baseline and soften chronic or intense feelings of distress. Typically, medicine won't be the only treatment recommended, but it can be prescribed along with therapy.

It is common for those with symptoms of depression to see improvements in their symptoms after 10-20 sessions of therapy—often without medication. This requires active participation by practicing new ways of thinking and behaving outside of the therapy. Just like medicine only works when it is taken, therapy only works when people try things in a new way.

This takes work, but it can pay off.

You don't have to manage these feelings alone.

Contact the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at **988** or text HOME to 741741 anytime.

Adapted from CBT Plus: Washington State Common Elements Initiative (Dorsey & Berliner)

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Last edited: 04/26/2024