

Let's clear up the confusion regarding emotions and illness.

Depression & Depression

Same word with two very different meanings. Depression may refer to a normal human emotion or to a diagnosed medical illness, a brain disease.

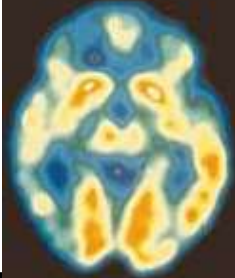
Depressed Emotion

Describes a normal, feeling

- People of all ages experience a range of sad emotions often referred to as "feeling depressed." Use of the term *depressed* or *depression* in this context, is *not* a brain disease.
- Normal depressed moods are a healthy signal, alerting humans of unmet needs.
- Normal range of sad emotions include disappointment, woe, grief, sorrow, downhearted, misery, low, gloomy, melancholy, and unhappy.
- Normal blue moods are situation specific and congruent with life events.
- Normal depressed mood may be secondary to poor self-care, boredom, isolation, loneliness, fatigue, dehydration, chronic pain, oppression, injustice, or living in a negative environment, relationship or job.
- Normal depressed moods are managed by coping skills, self-care, overall health and wellness as well as acceptance of the full range of human emotions.

Healthy Brain

Not depressed



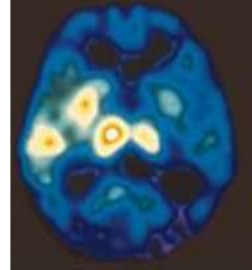
Depression-Disease

Medical diagnosis of a brain illness

- Medical understanding of *depression* as a *brain disease* continues to evolve. **Bottom line:** A brain diagnosed with depression looks and functions differently than a healthy brain.
- Changes in the hippocampus and raised cortisol levels, impede the development of neurons in the brain.
- The shrinkage of brain circuits is closely connected to the reduction of the affected part's function. While other cerebral areas shrink due to high levels of cortisol, the amygdala enlarges.
- The diagnosis of clinical depression ranges from mild to severe and has multiple types of depression. The diagnosis requires a minimum of two weeks of impaired functioning including changes sleep, appetite, energy, focus, concentration, behavior, thoughts and mood.
- Depression disease may become disabling or life threatening. Death by suicide is the result of the brain failing to function properly.

Depression Brain

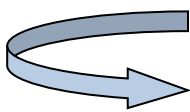
Depressed



Frequently Asked Question: *“I’ve been diagnosed with depression, which I am told is a mood disorder, a mental illness. I don’t understand. How did I get it?”*

Medical understanding of the brain and mood disorders is continually evolving and improving. Current research indicates that mood disorders are brain diseases that may be:

- Inherited
- The result of prolonged exposure to trauma or stress.
- Secondary to another medical condition.
- The result of an allergy or environmental toxin.
- Secondary to substance abuse or addiction.
- A side effect of a medication.



Brain disease leads to a

- Change in thoughts and quality of life.
- Impairment in ability to cope or function normally.
- Impairment in ability to problem-solve.

Depression is not a single illness. There are several different types of depression. There are also varying degrees of severity in each type.

Depending on the severity and type of the clinical depression, “normal” brain functioning is replaced with symptoms of:

- ✧ **Lethargy or restlessness**
- ✧ **Stagnation or impulsivity**
- ✧ **Self-doubt or grandiosity**
- ✧ **Anhedonia (Inability to experience pleasure) or euphoria**
- ✧ **Poor concentration or ruminating and obsessing**
- ✧ **Sleep and/or appetite disturbance.**

As mood disorders become more severe, symptoms increase. The first step toward understanding brain health is to know the difference between *normal human emotions* and *medical conditions*. The self-rated tests and clinical criteria in the “Testing, Testing, Testing” sections of both the anxiety and the depression mental help tools pages on this website will help you differentiate. Print off your test results to discuss with your mental health provider or physician. The symptoms sheets are intended as a guide, not as diagnosis or treatment of mental illness.

You are not alone, did you know that [“Mental disorders are the leading cause of disability in the U.S. and Canada.”](#)

You can call 988 for mental health emergency services 24/7