

This site is intended only for residents of the United States.



When you know more about what's wrong, you can help make it right.™

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Understanding Depression



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Everyone can go through times of feeling down or grieving for a while after having suffered a loss.

But for people with the medical condition called depression, feeling very sad or having no interest in activities can go on for a long time. Sometimes, this happens for no apparent reason to people whose lives are going well:

- A life-long tennis player finds she doesn't want to play anymore, and feels restless and unable to concentrate much of the time
- A busy young man feels "blue" for weeks, can't sleep, and loses weight even though he is not ill or dieting

And sometimes, depression can be brought on by a major life event:

- Months after losing her job, a woman still feels "blah" and has no interest in looking for a new job
- A year after her mother's death, a woman still feels sad, and thinks about suicide sometimes

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Depression Can Affect Anyone



1 out of 6 American adults will have depression in their lifetimes.

More people suffer from depression than you might think. Depression strikes people of all ages, backgrounds, and ethnic groups. It is estimated that about 20 million adults in the U.S. suffer from depression each year, and that to 25% of all women and up to 12% of all men in the U.S. will experience an episode of major depression some time in their lives. About 1 out of 6 American adults has had depression during their lifetimes.

Depression is not a sign of weakness or a character flaw. It is a medical condition.

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Recognizing Depression

Depression is a common medical condition with very specific symptoms. The symptoms of depression, as with any other illness, may differ from person to person. Not everyone will have the same symptoms.

all the same symptoms.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

The term depression refers to:

- a persistent sad mood and/or
- loss of interest or pleasure in most activities

And is accompanied by some of the following symptoms:

- Changes in appetite or weight
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Restlessness or decreased activity that is noticeable to others
- Loss of energy or feeling tired all the time
- Difficulty in concentrating or making decisions
- Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

For a doctor to make a diagnosis of depression, these symptoms must have lasted at least weeks, and be troublesome enough to cause a person distress or interfere with work, social life, or daily functioning. You should see your doctor to find out the possible cause of these symptoms.

Depression:
A medical condition with specific symptoms.

Sometimes, in addition to the symptoms of depression, many depressed people may also complain of physical problems. For example, someone might have chronic aches and pains that just can't be explained, such as persistent headaches, backaches, or stomachaches. Depressed people may also experience digestive problems such as dry mouth, nausea, constipation, and, less commonly, diarrhea. Being constantly worried, anxious, or irritable are also possible hidden signs of depression.

If you think you or someone you know may suffer from depression, take the simple [Self-Quiz](#) on this site. Your answers to the Self-Quiz can help your doctor or other healthcare professional learn if you may have symptoms of depression. Only a doctor or other qualified healthcare professional can make a diagnosis of depression.

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Causes of Depression

The exact cause of depression is not clear. No one is sure why some people get depressed and others do not. Sometimes, depression seems to happen because of a stressful event. Sometimes it seems to happen for no reason at all.

Genes may play a role. People whose blood relatives have had depression are more likely to have it, too. However, not everyone who has a relative with depression is going to develop it.

Today, it is widely recognized that depression is a medical condition that may be associated with an imbalance in the delicate chemistry of the brain. If this imbalance occurs, it can affect the way people feel and the way they see the world. It is thought that not having enough of a brain chemical called serotonin may play a role in depression.



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Depression is Treatable

Most depressed people can benefit from treatment. In fact, early recognition and treatment seem to decrease the length and severity of depressive episodes for most people.

Treatment Options

The most common treatments are antidepressant medicines, psychotherapy, or a combination of both. You and your doctor can work together to decide on appropriate treatment. Antidepressant medicines have been proven effective in treating depression. Today, medicines called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are the most commonly prescribed class of antidepressants.

In psychotherapy, patient and therapist discuss the patient's experiences, relationships, events, and feelings to identify and try to resolve areas of difficulty. Working together with a supportive therapist can help you find better ways of dealing with your problems.

To help people follow their treatment plans, a free educational program called RHYTHMS® available from Pfizer. Talk to your doctor.

Phases of Treatment

The length of treatment for depression is different for each person. In general, all medicines for depression should be taken for 6 months to 1 year. Studies have shown that to prevent depression from coming back, people should keep taking their medicine for at least 4 to 9 months after they feel better.

That's because depression can last a long time, and it may come back. There are three phases of depression treatment:



- Phase 1 lasts for the first 6 to 12 weeks that a person takes medicine for depression. During this time, the person should begin to feel better. But it's still important for the person to keep taking the antidepressant medication because the depression can still come back during Phase 1.
- Phase 2 lasts for 4 to 9 months. The person should remain feeling better with continued treatment. Usually, the person will keep taking medicine at the same dose during Phase 2. The person should not stop taking the antidepressant medication without talking to the doctor.
- Phase 3 of treatment can last another year, or longer. How long it lasts depends on the depressed person's medical history and on the advice of the doctor or other healthcare professional. Not all people need to take their medicine for depression during Phase 3.

See a Doctor for Help

If you think you or someone you care about may be depressed, it's important to talk to a doctor. Depression is a medical condition that responds well to treatment, so a good person to talk to is a doctor, especially one who already knows a lot about your or your loved one's history and health. Together, you can determine if depression is involved and decide on appropriate next steps.

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Looking to Friends and Family for Help

One important thing family and friends can do for those who are depressed is to help them get an appropriate diagnosis and treatment. This may mean getting them to see a doctor in the first place, or encouraging them to stay with treatment until they feel better.

It is also important to offer emotional support in the following ways:

- Acknowledge that the person is suffering
- Express affection, offer kind words, give compliments
- Show that you respect and value the person
- Help the person keep active and busy
- **Don't** expect the person to just "snap out of it"
- **Don't** criticize, pick on, or blame the person for his/her behavior

- **Don't** say or do anything that might worsen the person's poor self-image
- **Don't** ignore any talk of suicide; notify a member of the person's family or his or her doctor immediately

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Feeling Good About Getting Better



You may find that dealing with depression is one of the most challenging situations you have ever faced. But people who have been successfully treated for depression — and there are millions of them — say that being able to beat depression made them realize how strong they were. And once they got back to themselves, they appreciated life even more.

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If you think you or someone you care about may be depressed, talk to a doctor.

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Be sure to tell your doctor what medicines you are taking. If you are taking a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI), you should not take Zoloft. If you are not sure, ask your doctor if you are taking either of these medicines.

Side effects may include the following: upset stomach, trouble sleeping, diarrhea, dry mouth, sexual side effects, feel sleepy or tired, tremor, indigestion, sweating, feeling agitated, and having less appetite. In studies, most people did not stop taking Zoloft because of side effects.

The products described herein may have different product labeling in different countries. The health information contained herein is provided for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace discussions with a healthcare provider. Decisions regarding patient care must be made with a healthcare provider and consider the unique characteristics of each patient.