

Depression

What is depression?

Depression is a condition in which you feel sad, hopeless, and uninterested in daily life. The depression may keep you from doing everyday activities.

Depression can be mild to severe. It can last for a short time or a long time.

There are several kinds of depression. The most common types are:

- **Adjustment Disorder with Depressed Mood (ADDM).** You are depressed because something major has happened to you. Examples are events such as the breakup of a relationship, a major financial loss, moving, or being laid off from work. ADDM usually lasts a few weeks to a few months.
- **Bipolar Disorder.** This disorder causes extreme changes in mood, thinking, and behavior. There are usually two "mood phases": a manic phase and a depressed phase. In the manic phase you feel highly energized and are very active. In the depressed phase you are very sad, feel hopeless, and just don't care about anything.
- **Cyclothymic Disorder.** In this type of depression you go back and forth between mild mania and mild depression. During any 2-year period you have either mild mania or depression almost constantly.
- **Dysthymia.** If you have mild depression almost every day for 2 or more years, it is called dysthymia. If you have dysthymia, you may also have major depression at certain times in your life.
- **Major Depression.** Severe depression that lasts more than 2 weeks and is not caused by a specific event is called major depression. You may have major depression only once, or you may have it many times in your life.
- **Depression Due to a General Medical Condition.** Many medical problems can create changes in your body that cause depression. Some examples are a stroke, Parkinson's disease, hormone problems, and certain cancers. This is not the same as being depressed about your illness.
- **Postpartum Depression.** Many women have mild to severe depression after their child is born. This type of depression may last a few weeks to a few months.
- **Seasonal Affective Disorder.** Some people are sensitive to getting less sunlight. In colder climates you may get depressed as the days become shorter in the winter. This form of depression can sometimes be severe.
- **Substance-Induced Mood Disorder.** Drugs such as alcohol, cocaine, sedatives, and amphetamines can bring on depression. Stopping drug use for a few weeks usually improves your mood and ability to function. This depends on how long and how much the drug has been used.

Different kinds of depression last for different amounts of time. Often depression lasts a few weeks and never comes again. It can also last months or years. Some people have bouts of depression over and over all their lives.

What is the cause?

The exact cause of depression is not known.

- The brain is made up of cells called neurons, and chemicals called neurotransmitters. These chemicals affect your mood, emotions, and behaviors. The brain cells need the right balance of these chemicals to function normally. People with depression often have too little or too much of some of these chemicals in their brain.
- Depression disorders tend to run in families. It is not known if this is caused by genes passed from parent to child. It may also be that parents have a negative outlook, and children learn this behavior from the parents. Stress may also play a part.
- Some medicines can cause depression or make it worse. These include some blood pressure medicines, sleeping pills, seizure medicines, and steroids such as prednisone.

Depression is more common in women than in men.

What are the symptoms?

Depression can start at any age. It usually starts in the young adult years unless it is caused by medical or substance abuse problems. It may come on slowly over weeks or months, but it can also come on suddenly.

Besides feeling sad and uninterested in things you usually enjoy, you may also:

- Be irritable
- Have trouble falling asleep, wake up very early, or sleep too much
- Notice changes in your appetite and weight, either up or down
- Notice changes in your energy level, usually down but sometimes feeling overexcited
- Lose sexual desire
- Feel worthless and guilty
- Not be able to concentrate or remember things
- Feel hopeless or just not care about anything
- Have physical symptoms, such as headaches and joint pain
- Think often about death or suicide

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider or therapist will ask about your symptoms. He will make sure you do not have a medical illness or drug or alcohol problem that could cause the symptoms.

How is it treated?

Depression can be successfully treated with therapy, medicines, or both. Discuss this with your healthcare provider or therapist.

Get emergency care if you or a loved one have serious thoughts of suicide or harming others.

For more information, contact:

- National Institute of Mental Health
866-615-NIMH (6464)
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>
- Mental Health America
800-969-NMHA (6642)
<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/>

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