

# Suicide

## What is suicide?

Suicide is the act of taking one's own life. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in the US. Women attempt suicide more often than men. However, men are more likely to actually succeed in killing themselves.

The most common method used to commit suicide is poisoning, usually from an overdose of sleeping pills, sometimes taken with alcohol. Inhaling car exhaust fumes is another method often used. Men are more likely than women to use a violent method such as shooting themselves.

Suicide rates are higher as people age. The most common way that older adults commit suicide is with a gun. Hanging and poisoning are also common methods older adults use to kill themselves. In nursing homes, people may refuse food or fluids. This is called passive suicide.

## Who is at risk?

People who suffer from depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, or who abuse alcohol or drugs are more likely to think of suicide. Stressful events such as the loss of a loved one can trigger thoughts of suicide. The risk for committing suicide is higher if someone:

- Has tried to commit suicide before
- Lives alone and has little or no social support
- Is not married
- Has long-term pain or a serious illness
- Has a family history of suicide
- Is a veteran
- Is gay or bisexual
- Is unemployed
- Is over the age of 65

## What are the signs of suicidal feelings?

Signs that someone is depressed and thinking of suicide may include:

- Acting sad and uninterested in things that used to bring joy
- Having trouble falling asleep, waking up very early, or sleeping too much
- Having changes in appetite and weight, either up or down
- Not having much energy
- Feeling worthless and guilty
- Not being able to concentrate or remember things and letting the quality of his or her work go down
- Feeling hopeless or just not caring about anything

- Getting very moody, irritable, violent, rebellious, or withdrawn
- Abusing drugs or alcohol, driving too fast, or other risky behaviors
- Talking or joking about suicide or writing a will or suicide note
- Giving away prized possessions or throwing away important belongings
- Knowing how and where he or she would commit suicide

## **What can I do to help?**

Ask the person if he or she is thinking about suicide. You will not cause suicide by talking about it. You show that you care when you ask. It can be a relief for someone who is thinking of suicide to talk about it. Remind the person that no matter how awful problems seem, they can be worked out. Encourage them to talk with a healthcare provider or a mental health specialist.

Often a person gives clues that he or she is going to commit suicide. Most people do NOT hurt themselves or fake suicide just to get attention. Talking about suicide is a cry for help. If someone ever tells you he or she is planning to commit suicide, take it seriously.

If you think someone is suicidal, remove or lock up weapons such as guns, pills, and ropes. Do not leave the person alone. Call the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-SUICIDE or get emergency care.

The person may need to be treated until the risk of committing suicide has passed. Many of those who attempt suicide try it again within the next year. Both medicines and therapy are useful to treat depression.

For more information, contact:

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

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