

Understanding Depression Can Help

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Depression is classified as a mood disorder. It may be described as feelings of sadness, loss, or anger that interfere with a person's everyday activities. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than 18% of adults in the U.S. have some form of depression.

People experience depression in different ways. It may interfere with your daily work which results in lost time and lower productivity. It also can influence relationships and some chronic health conditions. Conditions that can get worse due to depression include:

- Arthritis
- Asthma
- Cardiovascular disease
- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Obesity

It is important to realize that feeling down at times is a normal part of life. Sad and upsetting events happen to everyone. But if you're feeling down or hopeless on a regular basis, you could be dealing with depression.

Depression is considered a serious medical condition that can get worse without proper treatment. Depression can be more than a constant state of sadness or feeling "blue."

Depression Signs and Symptoms

Not everyone with depression will experience the same symptoms. Symptoms can vary in severity, how often they happen and how long they last. If you experience some of the following signs and symptoms of depression nearly every day for at least two weeks, you may be living with depression:

- Feeling sad, anxious, or "empty."
- Feeling hopeless, worthless, and pessimistic.
- Crying a lot.
- Feeling bothered, annoyed, or angry.
- Loss of interest in hobbies or work.
- Decreased energy or fatigue.

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- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions.
- Moving or talking more slowly.
- Difficulty sleeping, early morning awaking or oversleeping.
- Appetite or weight changes.

Causes and Risk Factors

There are several possible causes of depression. They can range from biological to circumstantial. Common causes include:

- Brain chemistry
- Hormone Levels
- Family History
- Early Childhood Trauma
- Substance Use
- Pain

Risk factors for depression can be biochemical, medical, social, genetic, or circumstantial. Common risk factors include:

- Genetics
- Socioeconomic status
- Certain medications
- Vitamin D deficiency
- Medical illness
- Substance misuse
- Gender – the prevalence of major depression is twice as high in females as males.

Treating Depression

You may successfully manage symptoms with one form of treatment, or you may find that a combination of treatments works best. The following are treatment options for depression:

- Medications – your healthcare professional may prescribe. (Do not try to self-medicate.)
- Cognitive behavioral therapy – a therapist will work with you to uncover unhealthy patterns of thought and identify how they may be causing harmful behaviors, reactions and beliefs about yourself.
- Psychodynamic therapy – a form of talk therapy designed to help you better understand and cope with your day-to-day life.
- Electroconvulsive therapy – use of electrical currents to induce a seizure and has been shown to help people with clinical depression. It is used in people with severe depression or depression that is resistant to other treatments.

Lifestyle Changes Can Improve Depression

- Exercise for 30 minutes 3 to 5 days a week. Physical activity can increase your body's production of endorphins, which are hormones that improve your mood.
- Avoid alcohol and substance use as these things only make you feel better for a short time. In the long run, these substances can make depression and anxiety symptoms worse.
- Take care of yourself by getting plenty of sleep, eating a healthy diet, avoiding negative people and participating in enjoyable activities.

Remember that depression is a disease. Do not be afraid or ashamed. If you feel as though you or someone you know may want to hurt themselves, get help right away. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is **1.800.273.8255**. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the United States.

Be well.