

Depression

Are you feeling really sad, tired, and worried most of the time? Are these feelings lasting more than a few days? If yes, you may have depression.

▶ Brenda's Story

"It was really hard to get out of bed in the morning. I just wanted to hide under the covers and not talk to anyone. I didn't feel much like eating and I lost a lot of weight. Nothing seemed fun anymore. I was tired all the time, yet I wasn't sleeping well at night. But I knew that I had to keep going because I've got kids and a job. It just felt so impossible, like nothing was going to change or get better.

"I started missing days from work, and a friend noticed that something wasn't right. She talked to me about the time that she had been really depressed and had gotten help from her doctor.

"I called my doctor and talked about how I was feeling. She had me come in for a checkup and gave me the name of a psychiatrist, who is an expert in treating depression.

"Now, I'm seeing the psychiatrist once a month and taking medicine for depression. I'm also seeing someone else for "talk" therapy, which helps me learn ways to deal with this illness in my everyday life.

"Everything didn't get better overnight, but I find myself more able to enjoy life and my children."



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▶ Understand that Depressions a Real Illness

Depression is a serious medical illness that involves the brain.

Depression is not something that you have "made up in your head." It's more than just feeling "down in the dumps" or "blue" for a few days. It's feeling "down" and "low" and "hopeless" for weeks at a time.

About 20.9 million American adults have depression. It can happen to anyone, no matter what age you are or where you come from.

Depression can make it very hard for you to care for yourself, your family, or even hold down a job. But, there is hope. Depression can be treated and you can feel better.

Four Steps to understand and get help for depression:

- Look for signs of depression
- Understand that depression is a real illness
- See your doctor. Get a checkup and talk about how you are feeling.
- Get treatment for your depression. You can feel better.

▶ Look for Signs of Depression

Read the following list and put a check mark by each sign that sounds like you:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am really sad most of the time. | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel upset and fearful, but can't figure out why. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't enjoy doing the things I've always enjoyed doing. | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't feel like talking to people. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't sleep well at night and am very restless. | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel like there isn't much point to living, nothing good is going to happen to me. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am always tired. I find it hard to get out of bed. | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't like myself very much. I feel bad most of the time. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't feel like eating much. | <input type="checkbox"/> I think about death a lot. I even think about how I might kill myself. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel like eating all the time. | <input type="checkbox"/> If you checked several boxes, call your doctor. Take the list to show the doctor. You may need to get a checkup and find out if you have depression. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have lots of aches and pains that don't go away. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have little to no sexual energy. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I find it hard to focus and am very forgetful. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am mad at everybody and everything. | |

If you checked several boxes, call your doctor. Take the list to show the doctor. You may need to get a checkup and find out if you have depression.

▶ What Causes Depression?

You may want to know why you feel “depressed.” There may be several causes.

- Depression may happen because of changes in your brain.
- Depression runs in some families. This means that someone in your family such as a grandparent, parent, aunt, uncle, cousin, sister or brother may have depression.
- Sometimes painful events or losses such as deaths can lead to depression.
- Sometimes the cause of depression is not clear.

▶ Suicide

Sometimes depression can cause people to feel like killing themselves. If you are thinking about killing yourself or know someone who is talking about it, get help:

- Call 911.
- Go to the emergency room of the nearest hospital.
- Call and talk to your doctor now.
- Ask a friend or family member to take you to the hospital or call your doctor. If someone tells you they are thinking about suicide, you should take their distress seriously, listen non-judgmentally, and help them get to a professional for evaluation and treatment. Do not leave the person alone. If someone is in imminent danger of harming himself or herself, you may need to take emergency steps to get help, such as calling 911. When someone is in a suicidal crisis, it is important to limit access to firearms or other lethal means of committing suicide.

▶ Getting Help

Don't wait. Talk to your doctor about how you are feeling. Get a medical checkup to rule out any other illnesses that might be causing signs of depression. Ask if you need to see someone who can evaluate and treat depression.

If you don't have a doctor, check your local phone book. Go to the government services pages (they may be blue in color) and look for “health clinics” or “community health centers.” Call one near you and ask for help.

Get treatment for your depression. You **can** feel better.

▶ Types of Treatment

There are two common types of treatment for depression:

Medicine:

- Medicines for depression are called “antidepressants.” Your regular doctor or a psychiatrist (a medical doctor trained in helping people with depression) can prescribe them for you.
- Antidepressants may take a few weeks to work. Be sure to tell the doctor how you are feeling. If you are not feeling better, you may need to try different medicines to find out what works best for you.
- Medicines sometimes cause unwanted “side effects.” You may feel tired, have blurred vision, or feel sick to your stomach. Tell the doctor if you have these or any other side effects.

“Talk” therapy:

- “Talk” therapy involves talking to someone such as a psychologist, social worker, or counselor. It helps you learn to change how depression makes you think, feel, and act. Ask your doctor or psychiatrist who you should go to for talk therapy. Ask your doctor which type is best for you. Some people need both treatments to feel better.

For more extensive information on these topics and many others, please visit your online Health & Wellness Library.



SmartSelections

Information about Medications

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/publicat/medicate.cfm>

A detailed online booklet that describes mental disorders and the medications for treating them - including a comprehensive list of medications.

More Information about Depression

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/depression.html>

A comprehensive list of information regarding depression.

Depression and Other Illnesses

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/healthinformation/cooccurmenu.cfm>

This site provides more information about when depression co-occurs with other serious illnesses, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer, and Parkinson's disease.

Depression: What Every Woman Should Know

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/publicat/depwomenknows.cfm>

A fact sheet that describes the symptoms of depression and the reasons why women are more likely than men to suffer depression.