

# Depression

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# Depression

**What it is:** Depression is a mental disorder marked by a sad or irritable mood lasting longer than two weeks.

**What it is not:** Everyone gets sad or irritable from time to time, but for most people these moods only last for a few hours or a few days. When these feelings last for several weeks without improving, a person's way of thinking can be altered and the person may become clinically depressed.

**Who gets it:** About 10% of U.S. adults suffer from depression, but this number can increase with age, disability, or illness.

# What causes Depression?

- There are many different causes of depression. The following are some:
  - Medication side effects, particularly from drugs used to treat arthritis, heart problems, high blood pressure, or cancer.
  - Illness such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, stroke, hormonal disorders, and others.
  - Genetics- it may run in families.
  - A traumatic event, such as a death in a family.
  - Changes or differences in brain chemistry.

# Signs of Depression

- If a person has four or more of the following symptoms lasting two weeks or more, he or she may be depressed:
  - Sad, depressed, or apathetic mood. May cry a lot, or complain of feeling empty.
  - Irritability, agitation, or grumpiness.
  - Disturbed sleep-either difficulty sleeping, or sleeping more than usual.
  - Fatigue and loss of energy.
  - Changes in appetite and weight- either increased or decreased.
  - Loss of interest or pleasure in normal activities, such as self-care or social activities. Withdrawal from others.

# Signs of Depression

- Continued
  - Feeling of worthlessness, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, or self-reproach.
  - Thoughts of death or suicide, or attempted suicide.
  - Difficulty thinking, concentrating, focusing, or remembering.
  - Slowed or agitated movements or speech.
  - Complaining of aches and pains, dizziness, blurred vision, racing heart, anxiety, or vague discomforts.
  - Constant complaining.
  - Mood swings.
  - Excessive alcohol use.

# What should be done?

Even though depression is common, they are not normal, even among the disabled, ill, or elderly. These signs should be reported to a physician.

Other diseases can cause some of these symptoms, so the doctor will have to decide on a diagnosis and a treatment. We must never assume that these signs are a normal part of disability, illness, or aging

# Prevention

- Although many types of depression cannot be prevented, there are some things that everyone can do to lower the risk of developing these conditions:
  - Keep and maintain friendships and social activities.
  - Develop enjoyable interests and hobbies.
  - Stay physically active. Exercise and stay physically fit.
  - Stay mentally active. Read, take classes, and learn new things.
  - Maintain eye contact with family members.
  - Eat a balanced and nutritious diet. Avoid sugar, caffeine, and alcohol.
  - If you take medicines that might have depression or anxiety as side effects, follow the doctor's directions on using medicines to lower the risk of those side effects.

# Caring for people with depression

- The goal is to lift the person's mood
  - Encourage depressed people to express their feelings. Listen to what they say. Accept them as they are without making judgements. Give them time to get their thoughts together and tell you what they are thinking and feeling. Help them feel valued.
  - Brighten the environment by hanging pictures, posters, or family pictures. Make family photo albums easily available. Keep the environment neat and clean.
  - Encourage pleasant activities such as listening to music or performing a hobby.
  - Encourage socialization. Start with one-to-one conversations, and gradually help them participate in larger social events.



# Caring for people with depression cont.

- The goal is to lift the person's mood cont.
  - Encourage daily exercise or activity. Even the disabled can usually move a few body parts.
  - Encourage as much self-care as possible. Help the person gain a sense of control by letting them make as many independent decisions as possible.
  - Pay attention if someone talks of self-injury or suicide. Always report this to a supervisor.
  - Be sure the person takes his or her medications i the correct way and at the correct time.

# The warning signs of suicide

- People suffering from depression may decide they want to end their life. People suffering from either one of these illnesses may decide they want to end their life. It is important to be alert to things that may indicate a person is seriously considering suicide. The suicide rate is twice as high in people older than the age of 65 as it is in your younger age groups. Untreated or mistreated depression can lead to suicide. Pay attention to the following warning signs and follow them:
  - Talking about suicide. Statements such as “I have no reason to go on living” are danger signs.
  - Being preoccupied with death.
  - Giving things away.

# The warning signs of suicide cont.

- Continued
  - Stockpiling pills or obtaining some sort of weapon.
  - Refusing to follow doctor's orders about medications or diet.
  - Making unusual visits or calls to family and friends, saying goodbye to loved ones.
  - Getting affairs in order or making funeral arrangements.
  - Losing interest in things or people that used to be important.
  - Suddenly becoming happier and calmer after a period of depression or anxiety.
  - Talking about how worthless or helpless they are, saying they have no hopes or plans.

# Suicide prevention

The following are some things you can do to help prevent someone from taking their own life:

- Recognize depression in others and help them get appropriate treatment.
- Remove any weapons and be sure the environment is safe and secure.
- If you suspect someone is thinking about suicide, ask them if they are. Don't be afraid that you'll be giving them ideas. If they tell you they are having these thoughts, report it.
- Be sure a depressed person is seeing the doctor as ordered and getting their medications.
- Reassure suicidal person of how much you care. Explain that depression is no one's fault, that it can be treated, and that suicidal thoughts are temporary and will go away.
- Don't try to minimize the individual's problems. Don't tell them how hurt their family will be or that they have everything to live for, because this just makes them feel guilty and even more hopeless.
- If you suspect suicide. Report it.