

Dealing with Depression

Depression is often called the “common cold” of mental health disorders, in that most people experience depression at some point in their life. In fact, Major Depressive Disorder is the leading cause of disability in the U.S. for ages 15-44. And, the number of out-patient medical visits for depression per year are 21.0 million. While major depressive disorder can develop at any age, the median age at onset is 32. Major depressive disorder is more prevalent in women than in men.

What is Depression?

To meet diagnostic criteria for *clinical depression*, symptoms must persist steadily for at least two weeks. Thus while most people experience depression in their lives, a smaller number are clinically depressed. Depression can be characterized by either a depressed mood or the loss of interest or pleasure in nearly all activities. Depression goes beyond occasional feelings of sadness and interrupts a person’s daily life and functioning.

Individuals with depression also commonly experience:

- Changes in appetite or weight
- Changes in sleep - too much or too little
- Psychomotor agitation (pacing, wringing hands) OR
- Psychomotor retardation (slowing of speech, coordination)
- Decreased energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Difficulty thinking, concentration, and making decisions
- One may also experience recurrent thoughts of death or suicide as well as make suicidal plans or attempts

A person experiencing depression may self-describe as depressed, sad, hopeless, or discouraged. Individuals may also complain about having no feelings or feeling “blah.” Others exhibit bodily aches and pains rather than feelings of sadness. Family members often notice social withdrawal

What Causes Depression?

There is no known single cause for depression. Research indicates that it is the result of genetic, environmental, biochemical, and psychological factors. Depression is a highly treatable disorder; like most disorders, the earlier the treatment the more effective it can be. Seeking treatment early when signs of depression are first evident can greatly reduce the likelihood the depression will worsen or persist.

How is Depression Treated?

A combination of talk therapy and drugs worked best for treatment of depression and anxiety. For those whose treatment consisted of only talk therapy, they did almost as well if they had 13 or more visits with the therapist. Treatment from primary care doctors (MDs) was effective for people with mild problems, but less so for people with more severe ones, who did better with psychologists. Treatment by psychologists yielded significantly better results for people who started out in poor shape.

How Can I Help Myself?

- Turn to trusted friends and family members.
- Try to keep up with social activities even if you don’t feel like it.
- Join a support group for depression.
- In order to overcome depression, you have to nurture yourself.
- While you can’t force yourself to have fun or experience pleasure, you can choose to do things that you used to enjoy.

- When you're depressed, exercising may be the last thing you feel like doing, but depression requires you to act the opposite of what you're feeling!

There is no shame in seeing someone for therapy. If you or someone you love has experienced these symptoms for more than two weeks, take it seriously.