

DEPRESSION

Understanding Is the
First Step to Overcoming It



If you or someone you know has suddenly lost interest in the things they normally love, has trouble sleeping, or sleeps too much, there is a possibility that it's depression. Sometimes depression is subtle, and sometimes it can be in your face. The main thing to note is that if you're feeling hopeless, sad, and empty for more than two weeks, you probably are suffering from depression. Thankfully, depression is very treatable.

Major depression affects more than 7 percent of the US population. Sadly, most of the people suffering don't know that they're suffering and don't seek the appropriate help. Usually, the reasons for not getting help involve not having the right insurance, not being able to afford the care, or not accepting that they have a problem because it's considered a made-up problem by their circle of family and friends.

Since depression is a treatable disorder, this is sad. If you do seek treatment, you're a strong person who can recover. Don't allow the stigma or even money stand in your way. There are often places that can help you, regardless of your financial abilities. You'll be glad you did.

The Difference between Depression and a Low Mood

Everyone experiences stressful times and low mood occasionally. Usually, this is related to an event in life such as working too long hours, or a tragedy that you're coping with. But these types of low moods usually pass eventually. When a low mood doesn't pass, usually within about two weeks, or you cannot identify why you're feeling bad, then you may be suffering from depression.

In addition, there are other illnesses that you can have that manifest as low moods, such as thyroid disorders, low vitamin D3 levels in the blood, and even anxiety. It's imperative that you seek professional diagnosis to ensure that what you really have is depression before you try to treat your condition.

Remember that sadness like other feelings is a valid, human emotion. Everyone who feels low is not depressed. When you're sad, it's likely that someone can still make you happy, or you can listen to happy music, or do your favorite hobby and feel better. But, when you are depressed you cannot find joy in even the things that used to give you joy, no matter what they are.

Depression may happen even at the happiest time of your life because it has nothing to do with outward events. While it's true that sometimes depression can be triggered by a normal life event that you're having trouble accepting and getting over, usually it just happens for what seems like no reason. It's not different from getting another disease such as diabetes. It has a physiological reason for happening even if we're not totally sure yet what causes it, but it has a treatment that can help you manage it or cure it.

When you are depressed, you cannot just snap out of it. You can't just listen to a happy song, play with your kids, go for a walk, read positive things, or write a journal and expect it to magically go away.

Types of Depression

There are many different types of depression. If your symptoms have persisted for a long time, be honest with your doctor about them. Don't leave anything out. Even if you're not sure it's related to your disorder, you want to tell the truth and be honest so that you can be properly diagnosed and treated.

- **Major Depression** – Usually there is a combination of symptoms that have lasted for two weeks or longer. These symptoms interfere with your ability to enjoy everyday life, even when you loved them before. You may feel empty, moody, hopeless, pessimistic, worthless and more. You may even have thoughts of suicide or have attempted suicide.
- **Dysthymia** – If someone has depression for more than two years without it lifting, it's considered chronic. It's not different from major depression but you may have to be treated longer (if not for a lifetime) if you are diagnosed with dysthymia.
- **Persistent Depressive Disorder** - Some people are depressed for a long time, over two years, but it comes and goes. Some days you're able to be happy, but the depression comes back. This differs from bipolar in that you don't have manic episodes, just times of normalcy.
- **Bipolar Disorder** – There are many types of bipolar disorder that also involve depression. But often it includes manic episodes where you feel on top of the world, and then you plunge into a depression that seems to have no end.
- **Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)** – This is depression that happens due to weather, specifically dreary weather that keeps you from the sun. Some people find relief using light therapy but for some, this doesn't work.
- **Psychotic Depression** – This is typical depression along with a separation from reality. A person may suffer from delusions, false beliefs that are disturbing to others, and even hear voices and see things that aren't there.
- **Postpartum Depression** – Some women end up with this type of depression after giving birth. It is a hormonal imbalance. It can happen to 15 percent of women who give birth, and interferes with life and the joy in being a parent.
- **Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder** – Many women have worse premenstrual syndrome than others. Often this can be a serious depressive illness that needs treatment to help them avoid doing things they will regret.
- **Situational Depression** – Most people are sad after someone they love dies, they lose a job, or something else major goes wrong. But for some, they cannot shake it off and need extra help to do so.
- **Comorbidities** – Sometimes depression is brought on by medications, drug use, or illnesses that change the brain and cause major depression symptoms that should be treated to avoid them getting worse.

These types of depression can be diagnosed and treated by the right medical professional. Let's look at a few of the causes, signs, and symptoms of depression next.

The Causes, Signs, and Symptoms of Depression

The truth is, no one is sure what causes depression. People who seem to be happy and privileged still suffer from depression at the same rate as others. But, there are some things that seem to make depression more likely in an individual.

The signs and symptoms should be around for more than two weeks without treatment to properly diagnose whether it's depression or a low mood. However, if you or anyone you know is having suicidal thoughts, please seek help immediately.

Causes of Depression

Keep in mind that while these are considered causes, not everyone who has these issues has depression. Since only about 7 percent of the US population has depression, you can assume that more than 7 percent of the population has experienced one or more of these causes yet did not develop depression.

- **Abuse** – If you have a past where you experienced any type of abuse, whether as a child or an adult, you may be more likely to experience a major depressive episode that requires you to seek professional treatment.
- **Medication** – There are drugs that are supposed to treat other illnesses that can bring on depression in some individuals. Some acne drugs, antiviral drugs, and corticosteroids all increase your risk of developing major depression.
- **Conflict** – Often someone who is susceptible to depressive episodes will develop worse symptoms when there is a lot of conflict with the family and inner circle of friends. In addition, crime victims often develop depression due to the powerlessness and shame they experience.
- **Loss** – Most people experience a loss, financial or death, and can overcome it. But people who are predisposed to become depressed might find that their loss is a trigger to severe major depression.
- **Genetics** – There is evidence that these mental disorders run in families. If anyone in your family suffers from depression, you are more likely to also suffer, but it's not a sure thing that you will. They still don't know the mechanisms behind what is triggering depression or the gene that may cause it. If you have a parent or sibling with depression, you may be three times more likely to develop it.
- **Personal Problems** – Some people with major depression have personal problems that make them outcasts to their family and their circle. This can cause someone who already has issues to become even worse. This can sadly happen for people whose sexuality and gender identity issues are not accepted by loved ones.

- **Serious Illness** – Heart disease, diabetes, cancer, chronic pain, and other serious illness can be a trigger for major depression. When someone's life changes suddenly due to an illness, it can be hard to cope and accept the new reality.
- **Substance Abuse** – When it comes to substance abuse, it's not always clear what came first: the depression or the addiction. Many people believe that substance abusers often are self-medicating to overcome their depression or other illnesses, and then end up making their situation worse with a major depressive episode.

These are all potential causes of depression. However, keep in mind that it's possible that these are just triggers for someone who already had the right genetic makeup to suffer from depression, since many people experience these things without suffering from depressive disorders.

Signs and Symptoms

There are many signs and symptoms of depression to look for if you're trying to figure out what is wrong with yourself or someone you're close to. But remember, only a trained professional can diagnose anyone. If you suspect that you or someone you love has a problem, please seek professional services for them.

- **Irritable Mood** – If you feel irritable pretty much all the time, as well as depressed, that is a sign of potential major depression - especially if this is not how you normally feel.
- **Overwhelming Sadness** – If you find that you're crying a lot, and are sad about everything while having circle thoughts about this sadness, it's a sign that you may have depression.
- **Loss of Interest** – If there are things that you used to love to do and now you cannot find any joy in doing them, that's a sign of depression.
- **Weight Changes** – Often, depressed individuals have changes in appetite and either eat too much or eat too little.
- **Sleep Disturbances** – Many depressed people cannot sleep at night, or they sleep all the time and would rather sleep than do anything else.
- **Restlessness** – Some depressed people have described this as feeling as if they want to "do something" but they don't know what it is. They are too sluggish to do anything but have an inner restless feeling of things not being right.
- **Sluggish and Tired** – This has been described as feeling as if you have lead in your veins and the inability to wake up fully. You just drag yourself around each day with no enthusiasm and with great effort.
- **Worthlessness** – Many depressed people feel unworthy and even describe themselves as hating themselves. They cannot find reasons why anyone else would want to be around them or why they are in this world.

- **Guilt Feelings** – Often, depressed people feel guilty a lot but not about anything they can define, other than they're guilty that they can't do the things they want to do and feel that they should do. But they feel helpless to help themselves.
- **Problems Concentrating** – Depression can make it hard to focus and concentrate on anything. The mind starts wandering around and before you know it, you're confused about what you were doing in the first place.
- **Poor Decision Making** – Many depressed people don't make good choices in their lives because they are trying to do anything to feel better. This may mean becoming a substance abuser, going shopping, gambling, having affairs and other things to mask the depression.
- **Thoughts of Dying** – Some depressed people think about dying a lot. They wish they would just not wake up when they go to sleep. This is one reason a lot of depressed people sleep a lot.
- **Thoughts of Suicide** - Not all depressed people think of suicide, but many will develop within their mind very well-thought-out plans on how they might kill themselves. They tend to run through various scenarios trying to pin down how they will do it.

If you or anyone you know have any of these causes, signs, and symptoms, please seek immediate professional help. You won't just snap out of it; it won't just go away. Don't be ashamed, because depression is a real illness with real help for anyone who seeks it.

How Men and Women Differ When It Comes to Depression

The fact is that women are twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with depression, but the jury is out on whether that means they really have it more. However, women's biology is set up differently with different hormone amounts, which can explain the discrepancy.

- **Women Dwell More Than Men** – We know that most women tend to like to talk about things more. But a woman who is into her depression might have more circular thoughts and conversations with others than men. Unfortunately, dwelling doesn't make anything better. Negative thoughts breed more negative thoughts.
- **Men Self-Medicate More Than Women** – Men who suffer from depression are more likely to use substances to overcome their symptoms. Like dwelling, this just makes it worse because the abuse of substances tends to make them feel even more worthless, hopeless, and sad.
- **Women Tend to Experience Depression More from Life Events** – This may be because women carry most of the home life responsibility, even in today's world. Women are expected to work and be the primary caregivers for home and family. This overwhelms many women to the point that they struggle to process life events in a healthy manner.
- **Depression Is Harder to Diagnose in Men** – Because most men don't talk about their feelings and keep things close to the vest, it's sometimes harder to diagnose depression in men until it's too late.

- **Women Experience Eating Disorders with Depression More Than Men** – Women often have eating disorders along with depression. Either they eat too much and gain weight, or they can lose too much weight or develop anorexia or other eating disorders.
- **Medications Don't Work the Same for Men and Women** – When it comes to providing medical treatment for depression, men and women differ in what works for them due to the differences in hormonal balances.
- **Men Are More Likely to Resort to Suicide** – Men commit suicide at a higher rate, partly due to the difficulty in diagnosing men. The depression might get worse when undiagnosed, causing it to become so severe that the first time anyone realizes they're depressed is when they attempt suicide or worse, succeed.

While there are differences in both diagnoses and treatment for men and women, it's imperative to get the right treatment. Most trained therapists know that there are differences and will address them. You should seek help from a therapist that makes you feel comfortable and is trained to work with your gender.

The Importance of Seeking Help

No one thinks it's simple to get help for a problem. It's not. But when it comes to depression, the only way forward is to get help from a professional or group of professionals that know how to diagnose your problem and monitor you while you get help. The better the professional is that you choose, the more likely you are to be able to recover from your symptoms (or at least manage them) while living a satisfying and productive life.

- **You Don't Have to Be Alone** – No one needs to deal with depression on their own. In fact, it's nearly impossible to deal with depression on your own, especially if there is a biological component involved. People who say they've done that usually weren't really suffering from major depression.
- **Medication Isn't Giving Up** – Some people refuse to seek help because they don't want to be medicated. They have the idea that medication is a cop-out or somehow dangerous. It's not. There should be no more stigma surrounding medication for depression than diabetes or cancer.
- **Dealing with Friends and Family** – You're likely going to have some friend and family who think going to a psychiatrist is horrible, but others who are supportive. Surround yourself with the people who are supportive, and send educational information to those who aren't. But, speak out for yourself regardless.
- **Depression Will Just Get Worse** – Without treatment, your depression will not cure itself. It may even get worse. Why suffer alone for years and years when you can get help? It might take you some time to find the right person, but you would do that if you had another type of illness like cancer.

- **Depression Can Be Fatal** - If not treated properly, depression can be a fatal disease. It not only can lead to suicide, but it can also lead to illnesses such as heart disease due to the additional stress on your body. Seeking help for this illness is a necessity every bit as much as any other disease.

If you're experiencing symptoms such as overwhelming fatigue, sadness, your work and personal life are suffering, and you are self-medicating to cope, seek help as soon as possible. If you are suicidal or fantasizing about death, call 911.

Treatment Options for Depression

There are a variety of treatment options for people with depression. What type of treatment you engage in depends on your desires as well as the recommendations of your doctor. Regardless of the treatment you and your doctor settle on trying, remember that if it's not working you can try something else. But, like most things, time is the best thing you can allow yourself because something will work for you.

- **Medication** – There are numerous medications that can be tried for depression, depending on what type of depression you have and your overall health. Some medications require you to use them longer than 30 days to ensure that they work, or not. Some will give side effects that you'd rather not have, and some will not. You just need to try what your doctor wants to prescribe after doing your research, to find out what will work for you.
- **Talk Therapy** – This works best for people who have a known situation that may have caused their depression, such as abuse. However, it can also work to help people cope with depression that has no situational reason or cause or it's still unknown. The truth is, psychotherapy can help almost anyone even if they don't have depression, provided they are open, honest, and ready to improve.
- **Exercise** – You probably don't feel much like exercising, but studies show that exercising can improve mood exponentially even in depressed people. Find an exercise that doesn't feel like it's torture to you based on your current health, such as dancing, swimming, or running.
- **Lifestyle Changes** – It's important to look at your life and find out what you can change to improve your situation if you have issues that are contributing to your depression. Are you in a bad marriage? Do you have a job that stresses you out? Do you live a healthy life? Any way that you can improve your life is going to help.
- **Sleep Control** – There are some studies that suggest that for patients with sleep problems, the best thing to do to improve symptoms is a degree of sleep deprivation. Instead of sleeping eight to ten hours a night, work on sleeping from six to seven hours a night. Go to bed the same time and get up at the same time. Usually, within a few weeks, you'll feel differently.

- **Hospitalization** – For some people who are suicidal or otherwise destructive, the best course of action is short-term hospitalization that will allow them to be better diagnosed while in a protected environment.
- **Electroconvulsive Therapy** – You have probably heard of this as the thing of nightmares from old movies. But, there are good reasons to employ this therapy for some people who need the extra treatment to try to give some improvement in the quality of life. It's also very effective in treating suicidal individuals.
- **Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation** – This non-invasive treatment uses magnetic fields to stimulate nerves to improve symptoms of depression. This is another effective treatment that is used as a last resort.
- **Vagus Nerve Stimulation** – This can be a very effective treatment that uses electrical impulses to stimulate the parts of the brain that affect mood, sleep, appetite, and motivation. It's like a pacemaker and is inserted in the chest attached to the vagus nerve. However, it is not good for some forms of mental illness like bipolar or if one is suicidal.

These treatment options will give you and your doctor a lot to think about. You probably will start with medication and talk therapy. During talk therapy, your doctor may prescribe lifestyle changes to try to help you cope and improve your life. If that doesn't work, you may need to move on with other things on the list.

Self-Help Strategies

There are some things you can do on your own to help yourself cope with depression. However, this doesn't work for everyone. Depression isn't typically something you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps to cure. But try these things to help yourself.

- **Sleep Control** – There are some studies that show that sleep control can help improve depression - specifically sleep deprivation, which we mentioned earlier. This is not a good thing for people with bipolar disorder to do, though. Basically, the way it works is you limit sleep to six or seven hours a night and do not allow yourself to nap or sleep between your specific sleep time. It's called wake therapy and you can read more about this on [Wikipedia](#).
- **Exercise** – You know the deal. Exercise releases endorphins that make you feel good. You may not feel that great while you're doing it, but almost without exception, people feel better when it's over. Try to at least get out and walk for 20 to 30 minutes a day. You'll get the added benefit of more vitamin D, which can also help.
- **Diet** – If you are eating poorly, just improving your diet can help. But, consider that the brain uses glucose to work. If you aren't eating enough vegetables and fruit, you may not be getting enough glucose. Some people on low-carb diets who aren't eating vegetables can experience signs of depression when it's just their diet.

- **Vitamins** – It's a good idea to ask your doctor to do a blood test to test for vitamin levels. Vitamins like B12, B3, and B6 can be missing from your diet. In addition, many people who suffer from depression have vitamin D deficiencies.
- **Journal** – It's helpful to write down your feelings each day, but you also want to write down good thoughts. The brain tends to focus on anything you think about, so if you think about the positives in your life while keeping a gratitude journal, you may find that you feel better.
- **Meditate** – Starting a meditation practice can help you in many ways. It's good to try to focus on nothing for a short period of time each day and only focus on breathing. You can learn about how to meditate by reading books and looking for videos on YouTube.
- **Light Therapy** – For some people who have seasonal depression, light therapy can help. The key is to do it in the morning before 10 or 11 am, only for about 10 to 15 minutes, and to never do it at night. Some people only need to do it occasionally, but you want to do it prior to the symptoms developing rather than after they've already started.
- **Reduce Alcohol Consumption** – While you may love your nightly glass of wine, for some people it can make them more depressed. You may feel temporarily lighter when you feel that buzz from the alcohol, but it can cause problems the next day.
- **Avoid Self-Mediation** – Any type of self-medication, whether from legal or illegal drugs, is a bad idea for depression. Many drugs that people choose (such as alcohol, cannabis and so forth) tend to be depressants and can cause your symptoms to get worse.
- **Do Things You Used to Enjoy** – Even though you don't feel like doing things, the worst thing you can do is isolate yourself. You don't have to be as active as you were, but try to do something you used to love at least weekly. It'll make you feel part of the process of life.
- **Try Something New** – As we age, we change. Maybe you don't like the things you used to do, but you're stuck. Why not find something new to try? You may find a whole new love for something you never considered before.
- **Talk to People You Trust** – Hopefully, you have some people in your life that you can trust to talk to about what you're going through. You don't have to spill all the beans all the time, but if you have just one person to confide in, it can make life feel better.
- **Get into Nature** – The best thing anyone can do for their mood and overall health is to get back to nature. If you live in a city, it can be hard. But, often there are zoos and atriums and other ways to get into nature such as parks. Try to get outside at least once a day for just 20 to 30 minutes.
- **Find Support** – Sometimes you need support outside of your friends and family. Thankfully, today there are Facebook groups, Meetups.com, and other ways to find support groups for almost any type of condition. Try out a few different groups so that you can find the right one for you.

The best way to approach self-help is to make goals for yourself that you can accomplish within a short period of time. The more you experience success, the more you'll stick to your plan. But, if you do these things on your own and you are getting worse (be honest), please seek professional help.

How to Help Others Who Are Depressed

If you have friends or family who are suffering from depression, there are ways that you can help them without feeling as if you are walking on eggshells. Depression is a horrible illness that can be fatal if left untreated, and it can ruin relationships. Hopefully, if you can understand that no one wants to be depressed and that they can't just fix it on their own, you'll find it easier to be supportive.

- **Listen** – When someone who is depressed is venting to you, just listen. You don't need to give advice or fix their problem. Let them talk; show them that you're listening by paraphrasing back to them what they've said or by looking them in the eyes or kindly touching their hand or shoulder.
- **Show You Care** – It's okay to show emotion when someone is being emotional around you or is demonstrating dangerous symptoms of depression. Sometimes you may have to show you care by calling in a professional if your friend is suicidal. Be willing for them to hate you to get them the help they need.
- **Don't Criticize** – The worst thing you can do is criticize someone who is depressed. You can bet they already have low self-worth. This is not the time for tough love or that type of honesty. Just be there for them without judgment.
- **Don't Give Ultimatums** – It might be tempting, especially when it's a spouse or a child, to threaten and give ultimatums. But doing so could make things worse. People who suffer from depression don't make good decisions, so they're not going to do what you want just because they're going to lose you. In fact, they're more likely to push you away.
- **Understand That Their Pain is Real** – Depression sufferers are no different from anyone suffering from another disease such as diabetes or cancer. Their pain is real. Their feelings are real. They cannot just stop this from happening to them. If they could, they would.
- **Do Not Give Advice** – You're not an experienced therapist, so keep your advice to yourself about what to do about the depression. While some things might work well such as exercise, eating right, and so forth, instead of giving advice help them do that by inviting them to exercise with you.
- **Don't Say That You Understand** – Even if you've suffered from depression yourself, you don't know how they feel so don't say that you do. Don't turn things around to be about you, because they're not going to be ready to hear it until they're in therapy.
- **Educate Yourself on Depression** – Read books and watch documentaries about depression to help learn what you can, so that you're aware of the danger signs and can get outside help for your friend or family member if necessary.

Finally, if you fear for your loved one's life, ensure that you have the numbers to call at your fingertips to get your person help from a professional if needed.

Where to Get Help for Depression

Getting help for depression can be difficult depending on where you live and what type of insurance you have. But, there are usually community organizations that can help you locate providers such as [NAMI](#). You may have to find an organization like that if you live outside of the USA, but usually, they do exist.

Support Groups

You can also look at online support groups that have sprouted up due to the advent of Facebook groups and other social networks. The important thing to remember about online groups is that they may not be led by a professional; you should not take advice from people that you meet online when it comes to anything with side effects like medications, vitamins, and supplements.

There are also offline support groups that you can find, either with the help of a mental health organization, your doctor or by looking them up. These groups might have a therapist leading them and cost money, but there may be some free choices too.

Finally, especially if you have a loved one who has depression, keep the number for the national suicide hotline for your country nearby. The number for the USA is 1-800-273-8255. You can find the number of other countries on this list from the [International Bipolar Foundation](#).