



Treating Depression

- WHAT IS DEPRESSION?
- TREATMENT OPTIONS
- ABOUT MEDICATIONS

What is Depression?

Depression is a medical illness, like diabetes or asthma. One out of five people will suffer from depression in his or her lifetime. **Depression is a disease that affects all ages, races, and cultural groups.** Nearly 11 million Americans will have a significant episode of depression sometime in their lives.

What are the symptoms of depression?

- Feeling sad most of the day for at least two weeks
- Having a lack of interest in the things you always enjoyed
- Feeling empty or numb
- Feeling you don't care about anything
- Sleeping too much or having trouble sleeping
- Having a hard time concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Being irritable
- Having frequent thoughts of death or suicide
- Feeling aches and pains that don't go away, even with medication

People with five or more of these symptoms for more than two weeks have depression and should see their doctors.



Common questions about depression

Can't people just "snap out of it"?

No. You don't expect someone with asthma to snap out of it or someone with diabetes to just get over it. Depression is also a medical illness. Instead of affecting the heart or lungs, depression affects chemicals in the brain.



Can a difficult or sad personal situation trigger depression?

Yes. A sad situation could be a death in the family or having a chronic disease, such as diabetes. It can be compared to a heart attack that is triggered by shoveling snow. But sad situations are not necessary to trigger an episode of depression. You can just wake up one morning with the disease.

Can depression run in the family?

Yes. Close relatives of someone with depression have three times higher rates of depression than those not related. However, you can get depression even if no one else in your family has the illness.

Is depression really that serious?

Yes. Without treatment, up to 15% of those with depression commit suicide. Many others face broken relationships, cannot work, or start to use alcohol or drugs.

Can treatment for depression really make a difference?

In over 80% of cases, medications, therapy, or both, help to reduce the pain and despair of depression in about two to four weeks, sometimes sooner. Most people can return to the lives they led before they became ill.

Can I get depression again?

Some people only have one episode of depression. Many have episodes of depression throughout their lives. However, with treatment, those with depression can live normal, stable, happy lives.

The important first step

You have taken the first important step to feeling well again by talking to your doctor!

Be sure to take your medication and follow other recommended treatments, just as you would if you had diabetes or asthma. Remember, you too can feel better and get your life back.

Famous people with depression:

Abraham Lincoln • president

Cher • entertainer

Jim Carrey • actor

JK Rowling • author of Harry Potter series

Ted Turner • founder of CNN & TMC channels

Ludwig von Beethoven • music composer

Ernest Hemingway • writer

Terry Bradshaw • sports star and commentator

Michelangelo • artist

Winston Churchill • British leader

Charles Dickens • writer

Treating Depression

What can I do about my depression?

You can work together with your doctor to find the right treatment for you. Most people get better with a combination of the following treatments. Always tell your doctor what works and what doesn't.

Medications

In the last 40 years, many excellent medications have been developed for depression. Your primary care doctor or psychiatrist can find the right one for you. Medications may take four to six weeks to work. Some people try several medications before they find the right one.

Counseling or Talk Therapy

Your doctor may suggest you go for counseling. There are many kinds of therapy that work for depression. Some people feel better with short-term

treatment. Other people choose to be in therapy longer. Group therapy can be helpful.

Many people with depression have found **cognitive behavioral therapies** help them the most. This kind of therapy helps you change how you think. You learn how to have more positive thoughts.

Helping yourself

It's hard to make changes if you feel exhausted, helpless, and hopeless. You may feel like giving up. However, when people with depression get better, these feelings go away.

Steps you can take:

- **Break large tasks into small ones.** Decide what is most important and what can wait. Take little steps to feel better. It can help just to get up at a certain time each day or doing one chore around the house each day.
- **Make plans to be with other people.** Sometimes being with others can help lift your spirits. Consider joining a church, synagogue, mosque, or club. Get out of your house every day.
- **Talk to family or friends about your depression.** Those who care about you can help encourage you to go to your usual activities or take medications.



- **Expect your mood to improve a little every day**, not right away. Feeling better takes time. It's best to wait to make important decisions like getting divorced or moving until after you start feeling better. It is hard to make good decisions when you are depressed.
- **Exercise every day if you can.** Take a short walk or play with a pet for a few minutes.
- **Avoid using drugs or alcohol.** Get help if you cannot stop using.
- **Keep your appointments with your doctor** or therapist.



What You Should Know About Medications for Depression

How Family and Friends Can Help

It's hard to deal with any illness alone. Tell a close family member or friend about your depression. They can help support you during your treatment. Help them to understand that depression is a biological illness like heart disease or diabetes. It may be helpful for them to read this information about depression. They can also help you decide if you are getting better. Sometimes they can get you help if you have thoughts about suicide.

Remember, there is hope! People with depression can get better with treatment, medication, and support.

Why don't some people with depression receive treatment?

- They don't realize that they have a treatable illness.
- They are too embarrassed to seek help.
- They feel they should be strong enough to get better without help.
- They feel too tired or sad.
- They do not know where to go for help.



Taking medication for depression

Many doctors suggest medications for people with depression. The following suggestions can help your medication work better.

Before you take your medication:

Be sure to tell your doctor about:

- Other prescription drugs you take;
- Herbs and vitamins you use regularly;
- "Street" drugs you may take; or
- Alcohol you drink.

All of these things can change the way your medication works.

When to take medication:

Be sure to follow the directions on your prescription. It is best to take your medication every day around the same time if possible. If you forget a day, **don't double the dose the next day.** Take your regular dose at your regular time. Remember, medication works best if you take it **every** day.

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Side effects:

The first week is the hardest. Watch for side effects, including:

- Dry mouth
- Headache
- Upset stomach
- More tired or anxious

These usually go away or get better. If they don't go away in a few days, tell your doctor.

Contact your doctor **immediately** if you:

- Have trouble sitting still.
- Cannot sleep.
- Feel suicidal.

Be sure to ask about the long-term side effects for any medication you take.

When will I get better?

It takes from four to six weeks for most people to start feeling better. Don't give up if medication doesn't work right away. Within a few weeks, you should start to notice changes.

Don't get discouraged. If you don't feel better after a few weeks, talk to your doctor. **There are many medications for depression.** Your doctor can select another prescription for you.



How do I know when I am getting better?

- Your sleep is more regular.
- Your appetite has returned.
- You can concentrate better.
- Your mood is improved.
- You have more interest and energy for things that you like to do.

Don't stop taking your medication when you feel better. Always talk to your doctor before you stop taking a medication. Some drugs must be stopped over a long period of time.

How long do I take depression medication?

This depends on your health and your symptoms. Some use medication for a few months to overcome a single bout of depression. Some individuals take medication for a year. And some choose to stay on a medication that works for many years. You and your doctor can decide what is right for you.

Never feel embarrassed or bad about taking medication for depression. Remember, depression is a biological illness like high blood pressure or diabetes. In some people, it requires lifelong care. The good news is that medication can help you feel well again quickly. With treatment and support, you can have your life back.

For further information, please speak with your doctor, nurse, or therapist. Or you can call the MBHP Clinical Access Line at 1-800-495-0086 (press 1 for English or 2 for Spanish, then 4, then 2 to skip prompts). You can call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.



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