

Depression



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

Depression is a serious medical illness that can cause changes in your mood, thinking, and behavior. It may occur only once, or it may come back again. Everyone feels “depressed” at times. This is normal. When depressed feelings occur each day and last for more than 2 weeks, get in the way of your ability to go to school or work, or affect your self-esteem, then it is important to get help.

Signs of depression

Use this list to check (✓) off any signs that you have had for 2 weeks or more:

- Loss of interest and pleasure in activities you have enjoyed
- Feeling sad, irritable, empty, or down in the dumps
- Restless, unable to sit still, or feeling slow
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Feeling pessimistic or hopeless
- Thoughts of death or harming oneself
- Changes in appetite, weight loss, or weight gain
- Change in sleep patterns, such as not sleeping or sleeping too much
- Problems concentrating, thinking, remembering, or making decisions
- Loss of energy or feeling tired all of the time
- Loss of interest in sex

If you have any of these signs for more than 2 weeks, talk to your doctor. If you have had thoughts of suicide or of trying to harm yourself or others, seek help right away.

Who gets depression

Depression affects both men and women of all ages, races, religions, and ethnic groups. Women are twice as likely as men to become depressed. Depression does not affect everyone the same.

Compared to adults, depressed children and adolescents may:

- Not say they feel sad, but may show it in their expression or by crying a lot
- Eat a lot more or a lot less
- Say they don't care about things they have enjoyed
- Have behavior problems that get worse
- Show tiredness by becoming quiet
- Be more irritable or angry
- Sleep a lot more or have trouble sleeping
- Spend less time with family and friends

What causes depression?

Depression can be caused by different things or a combination of things. These may include changes affecting a person's body (biological), a person's genetic make up, or changes in a person's life (environmental).

Biological factors

- Change in brain chemistry, such as an imbalance in the chemicals that carry messages from one brain cell to another
- Taking medicine, such as steroids or some blood pressure medicines
- Having a life-threatening illness or one that causes changes in lifestyle, such as cancer, heart attack, stroke, or diabetes
- Alcohol and drug abuse

Genetic factors

- Depression can and often does run in families

Environmental factors

- Financial or legal problems
- A promotion at work
- Loss or threat of losing a job
- Graduation from school
- Retirement or divorce
- Moving
- Losing someone close to you

Treatment

We know more today than ever before about treating depression. If untreated, depression can last 9 to 12 months or longer. Early treatment can:

- Shorten how long it lasts
- Make it less serious
- Reduce the chance it will happen again

Treatment is often medicine and therapy used together.

Medicines

- There are many different types of medicines to treat depression. Some of these work well for some people and not so well for others. Your doctor may need to try more than one medicine to find the best one for you. For some people, a combination of medicines may be helpful.
- There are a variety of medicines, called antidepressants, that help depression. These work by restoring the chemical balance in the brain. These medicines are not habit-forming, but they are strong. They may take 2 to 6 weeks to work fully. Most people will need to take antidepressant medicine for 6 to 12 months or longer.

- When taking an antidepressant, it is important to:
 - Keep all of your appointments with your doctor.
 - Report any side effects or changes in your signs to your doctor.
 - Follow all instructions about how much medicine to take and when to take it.
 - Talk to your doctor before you stop taking your medicines.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy, sometimes called counseling or talk therapy, involves talking to a mental health professional to understand yourself better and learn ways to cope. It helps you to learn about your illness and better ways to solve problems and manage stress. Psychotherapy is most often done by a psychologist, social worker, nurse specializing in mental health, or a pastoral counselor.

Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)

Electroconvulsive therapy involves applying an electrical shock to the brain. The shock lasts 1 to 2 seconds and will cause the brain to have a seizure. The seizure causes the release of chemicals in the brain. These chemicals make the brain cells work better and improve a person's mood.

ECT may be done in the hospital by a psychiatrist, a medical doctor who specializes in mental health. The person is under anesthesia and does not feel pain. ECT is often given 3 or 4 times a week. No more than 12 treatments are needed to ease symptoms of depression. After your treatments are done, you may be started on medicine.

Talk to your doctor about possible side effects, such as short-term memory loss, confusion, nausea, muscle aches, and headache.

Ways you can help yourself

In addition to getting the treatment needed to relieve depression, there are a number of things you can do to help yourself:

- Eat a well balanced diet. Choose healthier snacks, instead of junk food.
- Stay active, even if you do not feel like it.
- Avoid being alone. Spend time with other people.
- Do not set difficult goals or take on more responsibility when depressed.
- Avoid making major life decisions when possible.
- Go easy on yourself and don't expect too much, too fast.
- Treat yourself with respect and kindness.
- Join a support group.
- Set a small goal each day that you can do, such as read the newspaper.
- Share your feelings with others.
- Write your thoughts and feelings in a journal.
- Be patient and understand your limits. Deep sadness is normal with losses, but it should gradually lessen over time.
- Contact professionals and ask about other ways to deal with depression, such as medicine.

- Think about joyful events in your life by looking at videos or photos.
- Plan to do something you enjoy each day.
- Watch your sleep patterns. Be aware of “sleeping to escape”.
- Involve yourself in creative activities, such as drawing, painting, and poetry.
- If anti-depressant medicine is needed, be open to its benefits.
- Consider trying meditation, relaxation, exercising, or prayer.
- Notify your doctor or counselor right away if you have suicidal thoughts.

Ways your family and friends can help you

- Help the depressed person choose to do things they enjoy.
- Encourage your loved one to engage in activities as much as possible.
- Do not minimize or reject the feelings of the depressed person.
- Encourage your loved one to reflect on some of his or her strengths, accomplishments, or positive traits.
- Avoid using clichés, such as “things could be worse.”

If you have signs of depression, it is not your fault. It is not a sign of personal weakness. Learn about depression and follow your treatment plan. Your family, friends, and health care team are here to support you.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.