

Depression: What You Need To Know

Depression

Clinical depression is a serious medical condition. It is not something you have made up in your head. It is more than just feeling “down” or “blue” for a few days.

Depression can include feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness and even thoughts of suicide. These feelings can go on for weeks or months. Depression can even affect how often you become ill, or how well you heal from a major illness.

Depression likely results from a combination of sources. It can run in the family or be caused by life events (a death, changing jobs, giving birth, moving, an illness).

There are different types of depression. You may have an intense, short-term reaction to stress. Or you may have a mild, long-term reaction.

Symptoms

Depression symptoms, how severe they are, and how long they last, will vary among people. Symptoms can include:

- feeling sad, anxious or “empty”
- feeling hopeless, negative or both
- feeling guilty, worthless, helpless or all three
- feeling irritable or restless
- losing interest in activities or hobbies you once enjoyed (including sex)

- feeling tired, unmotivated or having less energy than normal
- trouble concentrating, remembering details or making decisions
- trouble falling asleep, waking up early or sleeping too much
- change in appetite and weight
- thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- aches and pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems that do not go away with treatment.

Call your health care provider if you have any symptoms of depression. Remember, depression is a medical condition that can be treated.

Your Health Care Provider’s Role

You may feel uncomfortable talking about how you feel. But it is important to share your concerns with your health care provider. Depression is not your fault!

Your health care provider will ask you to fill out a simple form called the patient health questionnaire (PHQ-9).

It has 10 questions that will help your health care provider determine if you have depression, what type of depression you have and what treatment is best.

The PHQ-9 will also be used to check your treatment progress.

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Treatment

The most common treatments are medicine, talk therapy and self-care.

Medicine

There are different medicines used to treat depression.

You and your health care provider can decide which medicine is right for you. Take any medicine as directed. Call your health care provider if you have any side effects.

It is important that you keep taking the medicine even when you start to feel better. You will need to take your medicine for at least 6 months so the symptoms do not return.

Do not change your dose or stop taking your medicine without talking to your health care provider.

Talk Therapy

Talking with a therapist can help you work through mental health challenges and emotions.

Self-care

It may be hard for you to take action to help yourself now, but with treatment, your negative thinking will fade. To help yourself:

- Regularly participate in an event or activity you once enjoyed.
- Do mild exercise.
- Eat healthful meals and snacks. Include a protein choice at breakfast and drink water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages throughout the day.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Break up large tasks into smaller ones. Set priorities and do what you can when you are able.
- Try to spend time with other people. Talk with a trusted friend or relative. Try not to be alone. Let others help you.

- Expect your mood to improve slowly. You will not suddenly “snap out” of your depression. Your sleep and appetite will start to improve first.
- Avoid making important decisions such as getting married, getting divorced, moving or changing jobs, until you feel better. Positive thinking will replace negative thoughts as your depression responds to treatment. Others may notice a change before you do.
- Keep a journal of your progress. Make notes about how you are feeling.
- Think about joining a support group for depression.
- Do not blame yourself. This will make depression worse. Remember that depression is a medical condition. It is not your fault.
- Be careful about using alcohol and other substances. They can make your depression worse. Depression may lead you to drink more coffee, smoke more or take other drugs that will make you feel worse.

Getting the Most from Your Follow-up Appointments

For the fastest and most effective treatment, you will want your health care provider to closely watch your progress during your treatment.

During your follow-up appointments, talk with your health care provider about:

- any side effects from your medicine
- needed changes to your medicine
- watching your progress.

Remember, your goal is to feel better.

**Your next follow-up
appointment should be in**
