

# Treating Depression is Good for Your Heart

## Your Heart, Your Health

Everyone has times in life when they feel down, sad or blue. When these feelings get in the way of everyday living, they may be a sign of depression.

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), depression is common in people who have heart disease. Depression is about three times more common in people who have had heart attacks than in the general public.

When not treated, depression can lead to poorer recoveries and more problems (complications).

**You do not have to let depression symptoms get you down. Depression is treatable.**

## Depression Symptoms

Depression is a health problem (condition) with mental and physical symptoms. Not everyone's depression looks the same. Some people have many symptoms and some only have a few.

Call your health care provider if you have any of these symptoms:

- sad, anxious or "empty" feelings
- hopelessness, negativity or both
- severe guilt, worthlessness, helplessness or all three
- irritability or restlessness

- loss of interest in activities or hobbies you once enjoyed (including sex)
- tiredness or having less energy than normal
- trouble concentrating, remembering details or making decisions
- trouble falling asleep, waking up early or sleeping too much
- changes 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.

**Important:** Some of these symptoms may be normal to have for a short time after being in the hospital. Some symptoms could also be caused by medicine(s) you are taking. **Make sure to talk with your health care provider if you have any of these symptoms.**

## Depression Treatment Works

The most common forms of treatment are:

- **talk therapy (psychotherapy):**  
Talking with a trained therapist is one proven way to treat depression. It is recommended to try cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for mild to moderate depression before other forms of treatment.
- **exercise:**  
Regular vigorous exercise, done 3 to 4 times a week, has been shown to be as effective at treating depression as medicine. Talk with your health care provider before starting an exercise routine.

**(over)**

■ **medicine:**

There are many medicines used to treat depression (“antidepressants”).

Together, you and your health care provider will determine which treatment(s) is right for you.

## What Else You Can Do

■ **Cardiac rehabilitation (rehab)**

Cardiac rehab is a special program of exercise and education. Attending is important to reduce your risks and stress, help improve your strength and help you feel less depressed.

Many studies have found that people who attend cardiac rehab have major improvement in symptoms of depression.

When not treated, depression can affect the success of your cardiac rehab.

■ **Take care of yourself.**

If you are depressed, you will likely pay less attention to important needs. Take care of yourself by doing the following:

- Eat healthful foods.
- Exercise when you are able.
- Keep in touch with family and friends.
- Take your medicines as prescribed.

- Do not use alcohol or other street drugs.
- Do activities you enjoy.
- Try mindfulness exercises such as guided imagery, progressive relaxation or meditation.
- Break up large tasks into smaller ones. Set priorities and do what you can when you are able.
- Tell your health care provider if you have new symptoms or your symptoms get worse.

Most of all, remember that depression is treatable. With the right treatment and support, you can overcome depression.

## Resources

- Allina Health:
  - [allinahealth.org/classes](https://allinahealth.org/classes)
  - [allinahealth.org/mentalhealth](https://allinahealth.org/mentalhealth)
- American Heart Association:  
[americanheart.org](https://americanheart.org)
- Mental Health America:  
[mentalhealthamerica.net](https://mentalhealthamerica.net)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness:  
[nami.org](https://nami.org)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
1-800-273-TALK (8255)