

Depression: Signs, Symptoms, And Treatment



Overview

Depression (major depressive disorder or clinical depression) is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how a person feels, thinks, and handles daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working. If an individual is experiencing some of the following signs and symptoms most of the day, nearly every day, for at least two weeks, they may be suffering from depression:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
 - Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
 - Irritability
 - Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
 - Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
 - Decreased energy or fatigue
 - Moving or talking more slowly
 - Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still
 - Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
 - Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
 - Appetite and/or weight changes
 - Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
 - Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment
- Depression affects how a person feels, thinks, and manages daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working.
 - Common symptoms include: persistent sad, angry or “empty” mood; feelings of hopelessness or pessimism; changes in eating and/or sleeping habits; and loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities.
 - Depression is usually treated with medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of the two.
 - If a person thinks they are experiencing depression, they should contact their doctor or other healthcare provider.

Not everyone who is depressed experiences every symptom. Some people experience only a few symptoms while others experience many. Several persistent symptoms in addition to low mood are required for a diagnosis of major depressive disorder, but individuals with only a few but distressing symptoms may benefit from treatment. The severity and frequency of symptoms and how long

they last will vary depending on the person and their particular illness. Symptoms may also vary depending on the stage of the illness.

Treatment And Therapies

Depression, even the most severe cases, can be treated. The earlier that treatment begins, the more effective it is. Depression is usually treated with medication, psychotherapy, or a combination of the two.

It is important to note that no two individuals are affected the same way by depression, and there is no "one-size-fits-all" for treatment. It may take a person and their medical provider some trial and error to find the treatment that works best.



**CONNECTICUT
Clearinghouse**
a program of the Connecticut Center
for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery

800.232.4424 (phone)

860.793.9813 (fax)

www.ctclearinghouse.org

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

- **Medication**—Antidepressants are medicines that treat depression. They may help improve the way the brain uses certain chemicals that control mood or stress. A person may need to try several different antidepressant medicines before finding the one that improves their symptoms and has manageable side effects. A medication that has helped an individual or their close family member in the past will often be considered.

Antidepressants take time to work (usually 2 to 4 weeks), and often symptoms such as sleep, appetite, and concentration problems improve before mood lifts, so it is important for the person to give the medication a chance before reaching a conclusion about its effectiveness. If someone begins taking antidepressants, they should not stop taking them without the help of a doctor. Sometimes individuals taking antidepressants feel better and then stop taking them on their own, and the depression returns. When a person and their doctor decide it is time to stop the medication, usually after a course of 6 to 12 months, the doctor will help them slowly and safely decrease their dose. Stopping them abruptly can cause withdrawal symptoms.

Please Note: In some cases, children, teenagers, and young adults under 25 years old may experience an increase in suicidal thoughts or behavior when taking antidepressants, especially in the first few weeks after starting or when the dose is changed. Patients of all ages taking antidepressants should be watched closely, especially during the first few weeks of treatment.

- **Psychotherapies**—Several types of psychotherapy (also called “talk therapy” or, in a less specific form, counseling) can help people with depression. Examples of evidence-based approaches specific to the treatment of depression include **cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)** and **problem-solving therapy**. CBT helps an individual become aware of ways of thinking that may be automatic but are inaccurate and harmful. (An example might be someone who has a low opinion of his or her own abilities.) The person learns to question these thoughts and understand how they affect emotions and behavior and works to change self-defeating patterns. Problem-solving therapy is a form of CBT that assists individuals with coping more effectively with stressful life problems.

Beyond Treatment: Things A Person Can Do

There are additional things an individual or a loved one can do during treatment for depression to feel better:

- Be active and exercise
- Set realistic goals
- Spend time with other people, confide in a trusted friend or relative, and let others help

If someone thinks they may have depression, they should make an appointment to see their doctor or healthcare provider. This could be their primary care practitioner or a healthcare provider who specializes in diagnosing and treating mental health conditions. If an individual does not have a doctor or healthcare provider, they can call 2-1-1 of Connecticut for a list of providers in their area.

A person who is dealing with depression may experience thoughts of suicide. Help is available. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1.800.273.TALK) provides 24/7, free and confidential telephone support for people in distress. The Crisis Text Line offers free, 24/7 support for those in crisis. Individuals can text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the United States to text with a trained crisis counselor.

Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
www.ct.gov/DMHAS

NAMI Connecticut
www.namict.org
860.882.0236

National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1.800.273.TALK (8255)

Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741741

