

# About Depression

## Educational Guide

### About depression

Depression and depressive disorders are difficult to diagnose and understand. Once thought to be exclusively a mental illness, depression may be linked to a genetic problem and/or a chemical imbalance, as well as a sign of more severe mental problems. Depression is an equal opportunity condition, affecting female and male, young and old, and all ethnic and religious groups around the world.

Once considered a source of shame, research and media attention have created a general acceptance that depression is relatively common and not an embarrassment or a disgrace. The stigma once attached to depressive conditions is gone thanks to a better understanding of the physiological as well as psychological causes of depression and related symptoms.



The statistics regarding depressive disorders in America give some insight into the extent of the problem and its impact on people's lives and on our economy.

- Almost 10% of American adults (18 and older) suffer from a depressive disorder
- Twice as many women as men reportedly suffer from depression
- (men are far less likely to seek help or report depression)
- 41% of depressed women are too embarrassed to seek help
- 80% of depressed people are not seeking treatment
- 15% of depressed people will commit suicide

- Economic annual cost of depression is estimated to be over \$30 billion
- Depression accounts for more absenteeism than any physical disorder in the workplace
- Depression is linked to other physical diseases as a contributory factor, playing a major part in health care costs
- Loss of any type is considered to be the major risk factor for depression
- Depressive conditions are more prevalent in those who suffer from anxiety disorders and are involved with substance abuse

Because depression is responsible for employee absenteeism, its impact on the economy does not come simply from the cost of treating the symptoms. Its impact decreases the productivity of the workforce and it contributes to other physical illness. Recent studies have shown a connection between depression and heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, eye disease, and back pain.

### Types of depression

Depression and depressive disorders, and their associated symptoms, have been broken down into several types that include:

**Major depressive disorder.** Also called clinical depression, it is an illness that impacts every aspect of a person's life – work, play, sleep, and ability to eat. It is often disabling, may occur sporadically during a lifetime, and requires professional intervention.

**Chronic depression (dysthymic disorder).** This is depression that is characterized by a long-term depressed mood, usually 2 years or longer. Considered to be less severe than major depression because it doesn't interfere with day-to-day functioning, it is often viewed as part of a person's personality. Most people who seek treatment will have suffered from dysthymia for many years.

**Bi-polar disorder.** This complex mood disorder is also referred to as manic depression. It is characterized by periods of clinical depression that alternate with elation or excitable behavior called mania. Because a person's behavior can be reckless or potentially harmful during the manic stage, professional care is always recommended when a bi-polar diagnosis is made.

**Cyclothymic disorder.** This is also known as a less severe form of bi-polar disorder. Both the depressed state and the manic states are milder.

**Mood disorder due to other medical condition.** Hypothyroidism and a number of general health conditions

can contribute to a depressive state. Chronic pain is the most significant health problem that causes depression.

**Substance-induced mood disorder.** The use and/or abuse of drugs, alcohol, medications, and toxic substances can precipitate depression, both while using the substances and in the aftermath.

**Seasonal affective disorder (SAD).** A form of depression that has received more attention recently is a condition that creates depression and lethargy during the winter months but not during the rest of the year. Lack of Vitamin D3 is believed to be contributing.

**Postpartum depression.** Considered to be a rare type of depression, it occurs in women who have given birth to a child within the recent past. It manifests itself from 1 week to 6 months after childbirth, and can impact up to 10% of new mothers. While it can be severe, it is usually temporary although psychotic features such as delusions and hallucinations have occurred in some women.

**Premenstrual dysphoric disorder.** This disorder can occur in varying severity in women 2 weeks prior to the onset of a menstrual period, causing depression and irritability. Because it is hormonally caused, it is an example of depression that is caused by a chemical imbalance.

## Symptoms of depression

Mental health professionals agree that various symptoms can be indicators of depressive states. Not everyone has the same symptoms. Some people may have several or many of them, while others may have only a few. Frequency and severity of symptoms can vary for every person. Generally, these are the symptoms that suggest depression is present:

- Sadness and feeling of emptiness
- Lethargy, decreased energy, and unusual fatigue
- Unusual gain or loss of weight and appetite
- Insomnia, waking early, or oversleeping
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest in activities that were once pleasurable
- Persistent aches, pains, headaches, or physical problems
- Irritability or excessive crying

## Causes of depression

While there are definite connections between chemicals and hormones in the body that impact depression (physiological causes), there are certainly events in life that can also play a part. Short-term depression can be caused by loss or extreme trauma. Chronic depression has been linked to trauma in childhood that could include threats of abuse or verbal abuse; emotional, physical, and sexual abuse; conflict in the family; maternal separation; neglect; divorce; addiction and/or violence in the family; poverty; and racism or bigotry. Even depression that can be labeled as having a genetic basis is most often triggered by a traumatic event.

Negative, overly critical, or abusive relationships are traumatic and stressful, and can contribute to depression. An adult who has not experienced a traumatic childhood can exhibit all the symptoms of depression resulting from a toxic adult relationship.

Too much stress or chronic stress may have the same impact as trauma in people prone to depression. Both negative stress (loss of a job, overwork, caring for a sick family member) and positive stress (a promotion at work, getting married, or organizing a family event) can over activate the body's stress-response mechanism, setting off a depressive state.

## Managing depression

***Serious, long-term depression should always be addressed by a health care professional, particularly if the depressed feelings are accompanied by thoughts of suicide.***

There are a number of homeopathic remedies that are suggested for temporary relief of various depressed states, as well as lifestyle and diet recommendations that can help reduce stress and positively impact symptoms of negative thoughts.

## Lifestyle suggestions:

1. **Exercise.** Thirty to sixty minutes of moderate exercise produces chemicals in the body that stimulate hormones and neurotransmitters like endorphins that reduce stress and lessen the symptoms of depression.
2. **Spiritual practices.** Tapping into a spiritual core through prayer, Yoga, and meditation have shown a positive impact on emotional brain circuits. Psychotherapy can also help individuals retrain themselves to cope with depressive emotions.
3. **Strong, supportive relationships.** A sense of belonging and feeling cared for helps to cushion people from adverse situations and events, and decrease stress and a sense of isolation.



4. **Eat a healthy diet.** There are a number of studies that show eating well and avoiding junk food can help to improve overall mental health. Dietary suggestions are included below.

5. **Avoid alcohol and drugs.** Although many people believe that drinking alcohol is a coping mechanism for stress, research has shown that it is a mood suppressor, or depressive agent. People who are depressed should avoid consuming alcohol.

6. **Get enough sleep.** Sleep impacts all areas of health, and people who are not getting eight hours of restful sleep a night are at higher risk to suffer from symptoms of depression.

## Diet suggestions:

1. **Eat a diet high in nutrients.** Do not waste your time, money, and calories on foods that are high in fat and lacking nutrient value. Studies suggest that 'junk food' can contribute to depressed emotions when the quick calories from sugar or fat are used up resulting in a crash, or feeling of fatigue and low emotional state.

2. **Eat fresh vegetables and fruits.** High in antioxidants and vitamins, fresh produce is good for almost all the systems in the body. The effect of antioxidants on free radicals in the brain can be accomplished with consumption of fresh berries, citrus, melons, greens, peppers, potatoes, and tomatoes.



3. **Eat smart carbs.** Carbohydrates are known to increase serotonin levels in the brain, which creates a calming effect. Too much sugar, white flour, refined grains, and pasta can generate a temporary calming effect that is short-lived and causes a 'crash' that can cause symptoms of depression. Smart carbs include whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, fiber, and legumes.

4. **Eat healthy protein.** Tyrosine is an amino acid that boosts dopamine and norepinephrine, chemicals that improve cognition and mood. Tyrosine occurs naturally in fish and poultry, which are low-fat sources of both protein and tyrosine. Other healthy protein sources are beans and peas, low-fat dairy products, lean beef, and soy products.

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