

What is Depression?

Depressive disorder, frequently referred to simply as depression, is more than just feeling sad or going through a rough patch. It's a serious mental health condition that requires understanding and medical care. Left untreated, depression can be devastating for those who have it and their families. Fortunately, with early detection, diagnosis and a treatment plan consisting of medication, psychotherapy and healthy lifestyle choices, many people can and do get better.

Some will only experience one depressive episode in a lifetime, but for most, depressive disorder recurs. Without treatment, episodes may last a few months to several years.

An estimated 16 million American adults—almost 7% of the population—had at least one major depressive episode in the past year. People of all ages and all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds experience depression, but it does affect some groups more than others.

notice signs or symptoms

Depression can present different symptoms, depending on the person. But for most people, depressive disorder changes how they function day-to-day, and typically for more than two weeks.

Common symptoms include:

- Changes in sleep
- Changes in appetite
- Lack of concentration
- Loss of energy
- Lack of interest in activities
- Hopelessness or guilty thoughts
- Changes in movement (less activity or agitation)
- Physical aches and pains
- Suicidal thoughts

What causes depression?

Depression does not have a single cause. It can be triggered by a life crisis, physical illness or something else—but it can also occur spontaneously. Scientists believe several factors can contribute to depression such as genetics, trauma, brain changes, other medical conditions, drug and alcohol abuse.

Treatment

Although depressive disorder can be a devastating illness, it often responds to treatment. Empower yourself with the knowledge that there is always hope for someone with depression. The key is to get a specific evaluation and treatment plan. Safety planning is important for individuals who have suicidal thoughts. After an assessment rules out medical and other possible causes, a patient-centered treatment plans can include any or a combination of the following:

Psychotherapy including cognitive behavioral therapy, family-focused therapy and interpersonal therapy.

Exercise can help with prevention and mild-to-moderate symptoms.

Medications including antidepressants, mood stabilizers and antipsychotic medications.

Brain stimulation therapies can be tried if psychotherapy and/or medication are not effective. These include electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) for depressive disorder with psychosis or repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS) for severe depression.

Light therapy, which uses a light box to expose a person to full spectrum light in an effort to regulate the hormone melatonin.

invite yourself to have a loving, caring conversation

If you notice the signs and symptoms of depression within yourself or a loved one, take time to reach out. Depression can be a very lonely illness, and a support system can help someone manage or recover quicker. Be a good listener, be engaged, and be empathetic. Letting someone know you care can make a huge difference! It can even save a life.

challenge yourself to take these stigmatizing words out of your vocabulary:
Lazy Unmotivated Dramatic Attention Seeker Criminal Dangerous Crazy Psycho Selfish