

Depression

Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how a person feels, thinks and acts.

Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or loss of interest in activities once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease a person's ability to function. Fortunately, it is also treatable.

Depression symptoms

Depression symptoms can vary from mild to severe and include:

- Changes in appetite—weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling sad or having a depressed mood
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Increase in purposeless physical activity (e.g., hand-wringing or pacing) or slowed movements and speech (actions observable by others)
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much

Symptoms must last at least two weeks for a diagnosis of depression.

Depression symptoms in children and teens.

Common signs and symptoms of depression in children and teenagers are similar to those in adults. But there can be some differences, such as:

- In younger children:
 - Aches and pains
 - Being underweight
 - Clinginess
 - Irritability
 - Refusing to go to school
 - Sadness
 - Worry

In teenagers, symptoms may include:

- Anger
- Avoidance of social interaction
- Eating or sleeping too much
- Feeling misunderstood and extremely sensitive
- Feeling negative and worthless
- Irritability
- Loss of interest in normal activities
- Poor performance or poor attendance at school
- Sadness
- Self-harm
- Using recreational drugs or alcohol

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131501LA1222-E OHHLV7VEN1122

Depression symptoms in older adults

Depression is not a normal part of growing older, and it should never be taken lightly. Unfortunately, depression often goes undiagnosed and untreated in older adults. They may feel reluctant to seek help. Symptoms of depression may be different or less obvious in older adults. They include:

- Fatigue, loss of appetite, sleep problems or loss of interest in sex, none of which is caused by a medical condition or dedication
- Memory difficulties or personality changes
- Often wanting to stay at home, rather than going out to socialize or do new things
- Physical aches or pain
- Suicidal thoughts or feelings, especially in older men

Risk factors

Depression often begins in the teens, 20s or 30s, but it can happen at any age. More women than men are diagnosed with depression. However, this may be in part because women are more likely to seek treatment.

Factors that seem to increase the risk of developing or triggering depression include:

- Abuse of alcohol or recreational drugs
- Being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender or having variations in the development of genital organs that aren't clearly male or female (intersex) in an unsupportive situation
- Blood relatives with a history of depression, bipolar disorder, alcoholism or suicide
- Certain medications, such as some high blood pressure medications or sleeping pills
- Certain personality traits, such as low self-esteem and being too dependent, self-critical or pessimistic
- History of other mental health disorders, such as anxiety disorder, eating disorders or post-traumatic stress disorder
- Serious or chronic illness, including cancer, stroke, chronic pain or heart disease
- Traumatic or stressful events, such as physical or sexual abuse, the death or loss of a loved one, a difficult relationship or financial problems

Treatment guidelines

American Psychiatric Association →

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry →

References

“What is Depression?” American Psychiatric Association, accessed Nov. 18, 2022, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/depression/what-is-depression>,

“Depression (major depressive disorder),” Mayo Clinic, accessed Nov. 18, 2022, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20356007>.