

Understanding Depression and How to Get Help



Brought to you by ValueOptions®

ValueOptions® Depression Series

1

What is depression?

Depression is an illness of the brain — more than a case of “the blues.”

Medical studies show that our brains have millions of cells that allow us to function physically and emotionally. None of these cells directly communicate with each other. Chemicals send messages between our brain cells, and are necessary for our brain to function. Depression is caused by a reduction in these chemicals.

Anyone may have depression: old or young, rich or poor, male or female. Sometimes people feel depressed even when their life is going well. Many things may contribute to depression. Life changes and/or traumas such as losing a loved one or job, serious people conflicts, physical health problems, or moving. Depression may be brief or it may happen again and again. If you or someone you know has depression, you are not alone. Recovery is possible, and with treatment, there is hope.

What does depression feel like?

Many people think that depression means you feel sad, but this is not always the case. Depression may change many things in your life including:

It can change:

- How you look at things
- How you think
- Your sleep habits
- Your attitude

You may:

- Lose interest in sex or life in general
- Not be able to concentrate
- Gain or lose weight
- Become confused or forget things easily
- Lose track of what you are talking about
- Misuse drugs and alcohol
- Feel tired or anxious all the time
- Become more impulsive or get angry more quickly
- Not be able to leave your home or room
- Not be able to leave safe places
- Not be doing well at work, school, or home
- See and hear things that other people do not
- Experience body aches and pains
- Become very quiet and withdrawn
- Neglect personal hygiene
- Avoid people
- Have racing thoughts
- Withdraw from relationships or friendships
- Push people away or impair relationships

It may seem as if there's no tomorrow or no hope. Nothing makes you happy anymore. If you have serious depression, you may think about suicide, or hurting yourself or someone else. If this is the case you should seek help immediately.

When should I seek help?

If you are thinking about hurting yourself or someone else, or attempting suicide, seek emergency help immediately.



1

If you are suffering from depression, there are steps to control your symptoms and begin living a positive life. If you answer “yes” to any of the following, consider seeking professional help:

- Is your mood interfering with your personal relationships or how you do your job?
- Have these feelings lasted longer than two weeks?
- Is your stress from a single, identified stress (for example, the serious illness of a child) that does not have a clear end in sight?
- Are you beginning to feel worthless or guilty about the situation?
- Is the stress not allowing you to find happiness in other parts of your life?

Where do I go for help?

If you think you have depression, the first step is to get a proper diagnosis. Your family doctor may be the best place to start. He or she will rule out other health conditions or medications as the cause of your symptoms. However, you may not be comfortable in contacting your family doctor. If not, you may contact anyone you feel will support you such as your church, hospital, community mental health center or state agency.

Your family doctor or behavioral health expert may start treating your depression. He or she will consider how your body and environment work together to cause depression. From there, a treatment plan is made from any previous treatment you may have had, the seriousness of your depression, and your choice of treatment options. Professionals who treat depression include psychiatrists, psychologists, or Master’s level mental health professionals.

Which type of health care professional will be right for me?

More often than not, you will be treated by a combination of these professionals who team up to provide your care.

Psychiatrist

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor. They can prescribe medication and provide talk therapy. This may be the best choice when your problem is particularly severe, or if you have medical problems.

Psychologist

A psychologist has a doctoral degree (PhD or PsyD) in psychology. They have special skills for evaluation of problems and do talk therapy as well.

Social Worker or Master’s level therapist

Licensed social workers or professional counselors in behavioral health have Master’s degrees (MSW, LPC). They are helpful when your problems are complicated by family issues and problems with your daily environment. They provide talk therapy as well.

There are several treatment options. Your doctor may recommend “talk therapy” or “counseling,” medication with antidepressants, or a combination of both. These treatments have been shown to successfully treat depression. A combination of medications and therapy is used to treat many people, and your doctor can help decide what may work best.

**On rare occasions, medication has been known to increase energy levels before improving mood, a person with suicidal thoughts and increased energy levels could make a plan of self harm. With this odd combination of good and bad feelings, as well as improved energy, some may carry out suicide attempts. This is not the time to stop taking prescribed medication!*

Any suicidal thoughts must be reported immediately to the 24-hour Clinical Referral Hotline, your doctor, therapist or 911!