

## DEPRESSION

Depression is a mood disorder in which patients have persistent sadness and loss of interest in normal activities. The exact causes are unknown, but a number of factors seem to be involved. There seem to be physical changes in the brains of people affected by depression. Additionally, it is believed that brain chemicals called neurotransmitters play a part. Certain hormonal changes seem to trigger depression. Additionally, depression is more common in people with family members with depression, making researchers think that there may be genetic factors that are involved. Depression is most often diagnosed in patients in their teens, 20s, or 30s, but can occur at any age. More women are diagnosed with depression than men, but this may be because women are more likely to report symptoms of depression to their doctors.

### Some risk factors for depression include:

- Stressful or traumatic events
- Low self-esteem
- A family history of depression or bipolar disorder
- Being LGBT and lacking social support
- Chronic illnesses
- Certain medications

### Symptoms may include:

- Constant depressed mood throughout the day
- Lack or loss of interest in hobbies or other pleasurable activities
- Changes in weight and appetite
- Insomnia (difficulty sleeping) or excessive sleeping
- Excessive tiredness and decreased energy
- Unusual guilt and excessive feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, or helplessness
- Difficulty with thinking clearly, making decisions or concentrating
- Anxiety or slowing of physical movements
- Chronic thoughts of death or suicide

### What your doctor can do:

- Ask about your symptoms, medical history, and family history
- Perform a physical exam including a mental status exam
- Order laboratory tests to rule out other conditions
- Prescribe an anti-depressant medication specifically for your condition from the following medication groups tricyclics (TCAs), selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), or others.
- Recommend counseling, psychotherapy, and/or behavior therapies for mild depression and in combination with anti-depressant medicine for severe depression.
- Order hospital treatment of severe depression including electroconvulsive therapy (mild electrical brain stimulation to correct mood disorder).

### What you can do:

- Notify your doctor if you notice symptoms of depression as soon as possible.
- Take any antidepressant medication which has been prescribed by your doctor.
- Do not stop taking your medicine or change the dose without talking to your doctor.

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- Remember that medication therapy may take several weeks or months to have effects.
- Continue with counseling, psychotherapy or behavior therapy programs as directed.
- Talk to your doctor about the benefits of an exercise program and diet changes.
- Avoid foods with excessive caffeine and alcoholic beverages. They may worsen your symptoms or the side effects of anti-depressant medications.
- Do not take any other medication, medications of friends or relatives, or herbal supplements without talking to your doctor. These medicines may interfere with the effectiveness of the anti-depressants, may worsen your symptoms, or may cause severe and even fatal side effects.
- Keep a diary of your moods and share it with your doctor.

**What you can expect:**

- Treatment and lifestyle changes generally can bring depression under control within a few weeks.
- Complications of depression may include lifestyle disruptions like poor school or work performance, relationship problems, and drug or alcohol abuse.
- Lack of treatment or poor treatment may lead to worsening of symptoms and maybe even suicide.
- A small percentage of people may develop chronic depression.

Contact the Anxiety and Depression Association of America at [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org) for more information.

**Contact your doctor** if you are experiencing symptoms of depression, or if your symptoms are no better despite receiving treatment.

**Seek immediate medical attention** if you have thoughts of harming yourself such as suicidal thoughts.

*Reviewed by e-MDs staff 1/2016.*

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