

RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION

What is depression?

Depression is not just a case of the blues that goes away after a few days. Just like diabetes or high blood pressure, depression is a serious medical condition that usually needs to be treated. And just like those conditions, depression is linked to other health problems. For example, it can cause emotional problems, including sadness that lasts a long time. It can also cause physical problems, like back pain and headaches. For many people, depression can make it difficult to get through the day.

What causes depression?

Depression can happen to anyone. Experts believe there are many possible causes of depression, including:

- **Biological differences.** People with depression seem to have physical changes in their brains
- **Neurotransmitters.** These brain chemicals are linked to a person's mood. Experts believe they play a role in depression
- **Changes in hormones in the body.** These changes can result from menopause, problems with the thyroid, or many other conditions
- **Family history.** For some people, depression seems to run in the family. Depression is more common in people whose family members also have this condition
- **Life events.** Certain stressful events, such as a divorce or the death of a loved one, can trigger depression in some people
- **Early childhood trauma.** Stressful events during childhood, such as the death of a parent or abuse, may cause permanent changes in the brain. These brain changes may make some people more likely to have depression

There isn't a lot you can do to prevent depression, but the good news is that it can be treated. There are many options for treatment. Most people do best by using both medicines and talk therapy in their treatment plan.



What does depression feel like?

Depression affects people differently. For example, some people feel unhappy, but they don't know why. Other people have symptoms that are more severe, like thoughts of suicide. Also, factors such as age, family history, and gender can affect how each person experiences depression. Most people have a combination of symptoms. Some of the most common symptoms of depression are in the table to the right.

Common symptoms of depression

Emotional	Mental	Physical
• Feeling sad or hopeless • Losing interest in things you used to enjoy • Feeling worthless or guilty • Often thinking about death, dying, or suicide	• Having trouble concentrating or remembering things • Having trouble making decisions	• Eating much more or much less than you used to • Sleeping much more or much less than you used to • Feeling agitated or restless (for example, having trouble sitting still) • Feeling tired, as if you have no energy



Talking with your health care provider

Depression is a very common condition. In fact, almost 1 in 10 people in the United States has depression. Yet some of them have to deal with other people's negative view of people who have depression or another mental condition. This negative view, called *stigma*, is the reason some people don't seek the help they need. But it's important to take an active role in your care. That way, you can get the best care possible and start to feel like yourself again.

This work sheet can help you talk with your health care provider about how you are feeling. **Fill out this work sheet before your next appointment. Write your own ideas in the blank spaces.** The work sheet can remind you of important things to tell your health care provider.

Keeping track of your changes

What happened	Time	Notes
This is the change I noticed	This is how often it happened or how long it has been happening	This is why it bothers me, how I've tried to help, or other important thoughts about it
<i>I cried for no reason</i>	<i>3 times in the last week</i>	<i>It's embarrassing when I cry at work</i>
<i>I've been having trouble sleeping</i>	<i>Every night for the last 2 weeks</i>	<i>I'm worried because I've been getting to work late</i>

This work sheet can help you make a care plan with your health care provider. **Fill it out together during your next appointment. Write your own questions in the blank spaces.**

Getting help

My questions	My health care provider's answers
<i>Do you think there are any medicines that can help me?</i>	
<i>Do you think talk therapy would be helpful for me?</i>	
<i>Do you think a support group would be helpful for me?</i>	
<i>Do you think a pet would be helpful for me?</i>	
<i>Where can I find more information about depression?</i>	



Remember—depression affects people differently. Talk with your health care provider about how you're feeling and about any changes you notice. Together, you can find ways to help you manage your depression and feel like yourself again.

For more information about depression or how to find help, visit or call:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org or
1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)