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The National Women's Health Information Center

A project of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health



Frequently Asked Questions about Depression

What is depression?

Depression is an illness that affects the body, mood, and thoughts. About twice as many women suffer from depression as men. People who are depressed may feel hopeless, worthless, very sad, and have no energy or interest in doing anything. Some people describe depression as an "empty, or sad feeling that won't go away." This kind of depression that does not go away is called "clinical depression." It is different from feeling "blue" or down for a few hours or a couple of days.

What causes depression?

Many things cause depression. Depression can run in families. Changes in your brain chemistry and living through painful and difficult events in your life can cause depression. Sometimes depression is caused by certain medications people take for cancer, arthritis, heart problems, and high blood pressure. Some illnesses such as Parkinson's disease, stroke, and hormonal problems can cause depression.

What are the signs of depression?

Here is a list of the most common signs of depression. If you have some of these signs that last for more than two weeks, see your health care provider.

- Feeling empty, sad, and anxious
- Feeling tired, having no energy
- Feeling restless and irritable a lot of the time
- Crying more than usual
- Feeling worthless, helpless, hopeless, and guilty
- Having no interest or joy in life
- Having trouble sleeping, waking up very early in the morning
- Having problems eating too much or too little food
- Thinking about suicide and death
- Having trouble concentrating, remembering, and making decisions
- Having physical problems that don't go away when you take medicine, such as headaches, stomach problems, and pains in your body

How is depression treated?

Most people with depression get better when they get treatment. The two most common treatments for depression are medication and psychotherapy (talking with a trained counselor). Support groups can help. Sometimes just one treatment is used and sometimes a person takes medicine and sees a psychotherapist. Health care providers may need to try different medicines to find the one(s) that help you the most. It also may take a few weeks or months on the medicine before you begin to feel a change in your mood and outlook.

How can I get help for my depression?

Here are ways to get help for your depression.

- Talk to your health care provider about how you are feeling. Get a checkup to see if there are physical problems or medicines that are causing your depression. Your health care provider can help you get the treatment you need.
- Talk to a family member, friend, or religious leader you trust and who can help you find someone to treat your depression.
- Get more information about depression by using the resources listed below.

Depression is not something you can just snap out of and feel better. Depression is a serious illness that needs to be treated. It's not your fault that you are depressed, and you can get better.

For More Information...

You can find out more about depression by contacting the National Women's Health Information Center at (800) 994-9662 or the following organizations:

National Institute of Mental Health

Phone Number(s): (800) 421-4211

Internet Address: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

National Foundation for Depressive Illness, Inc.

Phone Number(s): (800) 239-1265

Internet Address: <http://www.depression.org>

National Depressive and Manic Depressive Association

Phone Number(s): (800) 826-3632

Internet Address: <http://www.ndmda.org>

*This FAQ was reviewed by Victoria Hendrick, M.D., of the University of California, Los Angeles.
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