

# Depression



**Depression is a common and serious health condition that can affect how you feel, think and act.**

It's normal to feel sad sometimes, especially during stressful situations, like the death of a loved one or the loss of a job. But if you're experiencing depression, feelings of sadness won't go away. They can continue for months, or even years.

If you get help, depression symptoms usually improve. In fact, 70 to 80 percent of people who get help for depression see their symptoms get better. The most helpful treatment is a combination of medicine and counseling.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of depression aren't the same for everyone. If you're depressed, you might have emotional and physical signs. Talk to your doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

- **feeling sad, down, hopeless, worthless or empty**
- **feeling irritable, agitated or restless**
- **a loss of interest in things you used to enjoy**— such as hobbies, socializing with friends and family, sports or sex
- **trouble concentrating or making decisions**
- **sleeping too little or too much**
- **overeating or weight loss**
- **headaches, digestive problems or chronic pain**
- **thoughts of death or suicide**

## Causes of Depression

Depression is a very common illness. One in 10 adults suffers from it. Depression may be caused by family history, physical changes in your brain, and current or past experiences.

The parts of your brain that control mood and behavior may work differently in people with depression. Chemical messengers in your brain, called neurotransmitters, help your brain communicate with the rest of your body. If you have depression, your neurotransmitters seem to be out of balance.

Situations or experiences that can bring on depression include:

- **grief because of losing a loved one**
- **major life changes**—like moving, having a baby or getting divorced
- **stress**
- **alcohol and drug abuse**
- **other health conditions**—including chronic diseases like cancer
- **physical, sexual or emotional abuse**
- **unresolved conflicts with others**

## Treating Depression

Depression won't go away on its own. It's not something that you can turn off and on. But there are things you can do to treat your depression and take control of your life. Once you begin treatment, you won't immediately "snap out" of your depression, but you will improve a little each day. Medicine, counseling and self-care routines can all get you back on your feet again and help you stay there.



To learn more, visit

**HealthyAdvice.com/  
DepressionOverview**

You can also visit these websites:

- **Mental Health America**  
[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)
- **National Mental Health Information Center**  
[www.mentalhealth.org](http://www.mentalhealth.org)

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## Medicine and Counseling

**Antidepressants** are a safe and effective treatment for depression. They work with your brain's neurotransmitters to relieve symptoms. You may need to try more than one medicine, or a combination of medicines, before you find what works for you. If you take medicine to treat depression, **don't skip doses or stop taking your medicine without talking to your doctor first.**

**Counseling** (also known as talk therapy or psychotherapy) can help you understand the causes of your depression. It can also teach you how to cope on a daily basis by helping you set goals and make changes to your thoughts and behaviors.

## Managing Depression

In addition to counseling and medicine, you can make these small changes to help improve your symptoms:

- **Be active.** Try to get some physical activity for 30 minutes a day, at least five days of the week. You can do things like walk, jog, swim or practice yoga. Exercise can improve your mood, energy level and overall health.
- **Change your diet.** Eat healthy foods, including fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Avoid foods that have a negative effect on mood, such as processed foods or foods high in sugar.
- **Spend time with your family and friends.** Don't isolate yourself.
- **Find ways to relax and relieve stress.** Take a bath, listen to music, write in a journal, or go for a walk.
- **Get enough sleep.** You might need as little as five or as many as 10 hours of sleep each night.

## Remember:

- Depression is a common health problem that won't go away on its own.
- Depression may be caused by family history, physical changes in your brain, and current or past experiences.
- Depression can be treated with a combination of medicine and counseling.

