



Depression & Your Health

Depression is one of the leading causes of disability worldwide. It is a serious medical condition that affects thoughts, feelings, and the ability to function in everyday life.

You probably know depression as a medical condition that primarily affects the brain. Its symptoms include persistent sadness, anxiousness, feelings of hopelessness, pessimism and worthlessness, and a loss of interest in hobbies and activities once enjoyed.

But the psychological symptoms of depression are just the tip of the iceberg. Because the brain is the body's "control center," the effects of depression spread throughout the body, often resulting in problems with sleep, appetite, energy level, sexual function, motivation, memory, and concentration. Performing everyday activities can be an enormous challenge for people who are depressed.

No one knows better the ravages of depression than the estimated 20 million Americans of every age who suffer from depression. Although women and older people seem to have higher rates of depression, it can strike anyone at any time. Those who have recently experienced a traumatic event, such as a divorce, job loss, or sudden death of a loved one may be at higher risk. Depression is not a character flaw, a lack of willpower, or a sign of emotional weakness. You can't simply wish depression away.

People who are "stressed out" may think their current situation is to blame. But a prolonged case of the blues that interferes with normal functioning is usually the result of a chemical imbalance in the brain. That's why treatment is so important – and the sooner the better.

Getting Treatment

If your depression screening score indicates you may be experiencing depression, seek help from your doctor or other health professional.

While there are many different treatments for depression, they must be carefully chosen by a trained professional based on the circumstances of the person and family. Prescription antidepressant medications are generally well-tolerated and safe. Specific types of psychotherapy or "talk" therapy can also relieve depression. However, recovery from depression takes time. Antidepressant medications can take several weeks to work and may need to be combined with ongoing psychotherapy. Not everyone responds to treatment in the same way. Prescriptions and dosing may need to be adjusted.

Where to Get Help

- Family doctors
- Mental health specialists such as psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, or mental health counselors
- Community mental health centers
- Hospital psychiatry departments
- Family services, social agencies, or clergy
- Employee assistance programs

Tips for Coping

Depression can make you feel exhausted, worthless, helpless, and hopeless. Negative thoughts and feelings can make some people feel like giving up. It is important to realize that these negative views are part of the depression and typically do not reflect the actual circumstances. Negative thinking begins to fade as treatment takes effect. In the meantime:

- Break large tasks into small ones, set some priorities, and do what you can.
- Try to be with other people, and confide in someone. It is usually better than being alone.
- Participate in activities that make you feel better. Moderate exercise such as walking daily, going to a movie or a ball game, or participating in religious, social, or other activities may help.
- Take time to eat warm, nutritious meals daily. The brain needs good nutrition to help it recover.
- Expect your mood to improve gradually. Feeling better takes time. People rarely "snap out of" depression, but they feel a little better day by day.
- Postpone important decisions until the depression has lifted. Before making a significant decision, such as changing jobs or getting married or divorced, discuss it with others who know you well and have a more objective view of your situation.
- Remember, as your depression responds to treatment, positive thinking will replace the negative thinking that is part of the depression.
- Let your family and friends help you.

Source: Adapted from National Institute of Mental Health web site.





Depression Self-Test

Instructions: Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems? Check the boxes that are most appropriate for you. Then go to www.wellsource.info and enter code **S458**



Symptoms	A	B	C	D
	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
4. Feeling tired or having little energy	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
5. Poor appetite or over-eating	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
6. Feeling bad about yourself, or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or the opposite – being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or thoughts of hurting yourself in some way	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

Total score (add each column) = + + +

If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with people?

- Not difficult at all
 Somewhat difficult
 Very difficult
 Extremely difficult

Depression Symptom Severity Scale (Put an 'X' on the scale below indicating your score.)

0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-27
None	Mild	Moderate	Moderately severe	Severe

Major depression may be indicated if:

- Question 1 or 2 is marked in column C or D, and a total of any 5 questions are marked in columns C or D,
- Or, if question 9 is marked in column B, C, or D.

You should see a health professional for further evaluation if:

- Your total score is 10 or higher, and your problems are interfering with your work or life,
- You marked any box on question #9 in column B, C, or D,
- Or, if you have further concerns or questions about mental health issues that are bothering you.

Note: If you are in an emotional crisis or grieving over a loss, your total score would naturally be higher than normal. This test is not a diagnosis but only a screening indicator to encourage you to seek help if needed.

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