

Teen Depression

Depression

Clinical depression is a serious medical illness. It's not something you have made up in your head. It's more than just feeling "down" or "blue" for a few days.

Depression can include feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness and even thoughts of suicide. These feelings can go on for weeks or months. Depression can change your mood and your thoughts, leaving you feeling stuck in a rut. It can even affect how often you become ill, or how well you heal from a major illness.

Depression can affect your grades or attendance at school, your relationships with family and friends, and can lead to self-harm or dangerous behaviors such as alcohol, drug or unsafe sexual behaviors.

About 4 percent of adolescents become seriously depressed each year. Depression can be treated. If left untreated, it can get worse, last longer and keep you from enjoying life.

Having depression is like having a physical illness. It can and should be treated.

Symptoms of Depression

Depression in teenagers does not always present the way it does in adults. Teenagers may seem very angry, irritable, or be getting into more trouble when in fact, he or she is actually depressed.

If you or your teen has had five or more of the following symptoms for more than 2 weeks, please call a doctor. You do not need to feel ashamed or embarrassed.

Symptoms can include:

- having sad, anxious or "empty" feelings
- feeling hopeless and/or negative
- feeling guilty, worthless and/or helpless
- feeling irritable or restless
- losing interest in activities or hobbies you once enjoyed
- feeling tired or having less energy than normal
- having trouble concentrating, remembering details or making decisions
- trouble falling asleep, waking up early, or sleeping too much
- having changes in appetite and weight
- having thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- having aches and pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems that do not go away with treatment.

Causes

Depression can be caused by a single life-changing event such as a death, divorce, moving, breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, a major illness, or an imbalance in brain chemistry. Depression can affect anyone at any age.

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Talk to Someone

It is common for teenagers to react to the pain of depression by turning to alcohol, other drugs or sex. Another common reaction is getting into trouble at school and/or with family and friends.

You are not alone and you should not have to suffer alone. If you think you or your teen may have depression, talk to someone. Talk to a trusted adult, family member, close friend or your primary care provider. There are people who can help you or your teen get treatment.

Suicidal Thoughts or Attempts

Most people who are depressed do not commit suicide although depression does increase the risk for suicide or suicide attempts. It is not true that people who talk about suicide do not attempt it. Any thoughts, remarks or attempts at suicide are serious. Please — if you or your teen think about or are considering suicide, get help right away!

Treatments

Having depression doesn't mean you are weak or a failure. You are not alone. Depression can be treated. You or your teen can be helped by self-care, talk therapy and medicine.

■ Self-care

- Set realistic goals for your progress. Your recovery may take time. If you have a task that seems too large, break it into smaller parts.
- Reward yourself when you reach a goal.
- Learn about depression. Your primary care provider can suggest resources.
- Look for healthy activities that make you feel better. Maybe start a hobby or take classes.
- Keep a journal of your progress. Make notes about how you are feeling.
- Think about how family problems, losses or other upsetting events may add to your depression.

- Try to keep an active social life.
- Do mild exercise.
- Try to spend time with other people. Talk with a trusted friend or relative. Try not to be alone. Let others help you.

■ Talk therapy:

Talking about your feelings with a trained therapist may help you to break the cycle of negative thoughts. The type that is right for you will depend on your age and level of depression.

Together, medicine and talk therapy can lower your chances of having depression again in the future.

■ Medicine:

Antidepressants help keep your brain chemicals in balance to regulate your mood. You and your primary care provider can decide which medicine is right for you. (Please be patient. It may take a few weeks before you feel better.)

What to do in a Crisis

Never leave someone in crisis alone. If you or someone close to you is in crisis, call:

- **the toll-free, 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).**
- your primary care provider
- 911 or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department. (Ask a family member or friend to help you.)

Information adapted from the National Institute of Mental Health.