



Clinical Depression

Clinical depression is much more than feeling sad. Depression causes people to lose pleasure in daily life, to lose pleasure in things that once brought happiness, or made them feel good. It can make you feel hopeless, tired, and think “what’s the point?” It can make getting out of bed in the morning a struggle. It can even make you feel angry and irritable. Clinical Depression can make other medical conditions worse, and in the most serious cases, it can lead to suicide.

Depression can happen to any man, woman, or child—young or old, rich or poor, sick or healthy, black or white. Depression can happen to anyone.

While it is normal to feel sad or blue once in awhile, depression is never a “normal” part of life. Unfortunately, fewer than half of all people suffering from depression get help, even though treatment for depression is almost always successful. Many people think that they can treat depression themselves or that depression is a personal weakness. Depression is a serious medical condition.

People with depression often have too little or too much of certain brain chemicals called neurotransmitters. Changes in these brain chemicals may cause or worsen clinical depression. Fortunately, medications and other treatments are available to help correct this medical situation.

Common Causes

Many times, there is no clear reason why a person becomes depressed. But there are certain things that can increase the likelihood that you may develop depression:

- If you have had depression in the past
- If someone in your family has had depression
- If you are a woman (women reportedly experience depression twice as much as men)
- If you have a chronic illness like diabetes, heart disease, COPD, cancer, Alzheimer’s, hormonal disorders, chronic pain, or other long-term illness.
- If you are taking certain medications
- If you are undergoing big changes in your life—even if they are good ones, like having a baby, getting a new job, winning an award, graduating, or retirement
- If you are experiencing difficulties in your life, like financial problems, divorce, possible loss of your job, or death of a loved one (including pets)

How Do I Know If I’m Depressed?

Everyone feels sad or down at times—and this is normal. When these feelings last for more than two weeks, interfere with your ability to go to work or school, or affect the way you feel about yourself, then this is an illness. Clinical depression is a medical problem, and you must always remember that you are not alone.

Symptoms

- Feeling sad, blue, or down in the dumps; crying a lot
- Having a sad, anxious or “empty” mood; feeling like “what’s the point?”
- Loss of pleasure and interest in activities you once enjoyed, including sex
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Over-eating or loss of appetite
- Weight gain or weight loss
- Irritability, or anger
- Persistent physical problems like headache, stomachache, backache, general aches and pains
- Difficulty concentrating, thinking, or remembering
- Difficulty making decisions—even small, everyday decisions
- Feeling tired all the time; fatigue, or loss of energy
- Feeling guilty, or worthless
- Feeling hopeless, negative, or pessimistic
- Withdrawing from others
- Thoughts of death or suicide or trying to harm yourself



If you have five or more of these symptoms for two weeks or more, you may have clinical depression and should see your doctor or a qualified behavioral health professional as soon as possible. HELP IS AVAILABLE.

Sometimes it is very hard to take that first step toward feeling better because the depression itself is making you feel hopeless. **If you think you may be depressed, don't delay. Call your doctor.**

How To Help Yourself If You Are Depressed

Depressive disorders can make you feel exhausted, worthless, helpless, and hopeless. It is important to realize that these negative views are part of the depression and typically do not accurately reflect the actual circumstances. Negative thinking will fade as treatment begins to take effect, so if you have been prescribed medicine, be sure to take it; and if you are seeing a counselor, keep your appointments. In the meantime, there are some things that can help:

Specifically:

- Try to be with other people and to confide in someone; it is usually better than being alone and secretive
- Participate in activities that make you feel better. Going to a movie, a ballgame, or participating in religious, social, or other activities may help.
- Exercise. Walk, dance, join an aerobics class, get an exercise video/DVD—it doesn't matter what you do, as long as you move. Exercise will release endorphins, which are chemicals produced by your body that improve your mood and help you feel better.
- Smile. Research has shown that the physical act of smiling—even if you don't feel happy—can cause a release of serotonin and endorphins, which are hormones that improve your mood.
- Try to eat a balanced diet and avoid excess sugar and carbohydrates
- Stay away from alcohol
- Get plenty of rest
- Increase your exposure to natural light (but always protect your skin from UV rays)
- Get involved in the life of a child. Children can reconnect us to the wonder and joy in life.
- Nurture yourself. Immerse yourself in things that make you feel warm, loved, and serene. Drink soothing tea. Light scented candles. Wrap yourself in a cozy quilt or afghan. Look at pictures that remind you of happy times. Read uplifting stories. Play music that invigorates and gives you hope.
- Let your family and friends help you



Generally:

- Set realistic goals, taking your depression into consideration, and be reasonable in what you expect to accomplish
- Break large tasks into small ones, set some priorities, and do what you can as you are able.
- Understand that activities and spending time with people can be helpful, but pushing to do too much too soon can increase feelings of failure.
- Expect your mood to improve gradually, not immediately. Feeling better takes time.
- It's best to postpone important decisions until the depression has lifted. Before deciding to make a significant transition—like change jobs, get married or divorced—discuss it with others who know you well and have a more objective view of your situation.
- Be aware of negative self-speak, even if you don't speak it out loud. Saying things like, “Nothing ever goes right for me” can turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Try to keep your self-speak positive, and hopeful.
- Remember, positive thinking will replace the negative thinking that is part of depression and will disappear as your depression responds to treatment.

If at any time you have thoughts of suicide or of harming yourself or others, call your doctor IMMEDIATELY. Don't delay. Help is available.