



DEPRESSION

A Mental Health Guide

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OVERVIEW

Major depressive disorder is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and manage daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working for at least two weeks. About 7% of people in the United States have a major depressive disorder in any given year. Young adults ages 18–29 are three times more likely to have the disorder than people over 60. In addition, more women than men have a major depressive disorder. Some forms of depression are slightly different, or they may develop under unique circumstances, such as:

- **Persistent Depressive Disorder** (also called dysthymia) is a depressed mood that lasts for two years. A person diagnosed with persistent depressive disorder may have episodes of major depression along with periods of less severe symptoms. Still, symptoms must last for two years for the diagnosis.
- **Postpartum Depression** is much more serious than the “baby blues” (relatively mild depressive and anxiety symptoms typically clear within two weeks after delivery) that many women experience after giving birth—women with postpartum depression experience full-blown major depression during pregnancy or after delivery (postpartum depression). The feelings of extreme sadness, anxiety, and exhaustion accompanying postpartum depression may make it difficult for these new mothers to complete daily care activities for themselves and their babies.
- **Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder** occurs when a woman has severe depression, irritability, and tension 1 week before menstruation (bleeding) begins. These symptoms lessen a few days after menstruation begins, and they end 1 week after menstruation stops. This diagnosis requires specific symptoms that lead to relationships and work, school, or social function problems.
- **Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder** is diagnosed in children at least six years of age who are severely irritable or angry with frequent temper outbursts. These outbursts are more intense and last longer than a typical temper tantrum. The outburst occurs as often as three times a week for over a year. When not having an outburst, children with the disorder are still irritable or angry nearly every day.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

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Depressive disorders may occur only once, or you may experience multiple episodes. If you have been experiencing some of the following signs and symptoms most of the day, nearly every day, for at least two weeks, you may be suffering from depression:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Irritability
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Moving or talking more slowly
- Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment

Signs and symptoms in children, teenagers, and older adults may have some differences.

- In younger children— clinginess, worry, stomach or headaches, refusing to go to school, or being underweight.
- In teens— feeling negative and worthless, anger, poor performance or attendance at school, feeling misunderstood and extremely sensitive, using recreational drugs or alcohol, eating or sleeping too much, self-harm, loss of interest in normal activities, and avoidance of social interaction.
- In older adults— memory difficulties or personality changes, physical aches or pain, fatigue, loss of appetite, sleep problems, or loss of interest in sex — not caused by a medical condition or medication, often not wanting to go out to socialize or do new things, and suicidal thinking or feelings, especially in older men.



SUPPORTS & TREATMENT

Depression is one of the most treatable disorders. Current research suggests that depression is caused by a combination of genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological factors. Some factors that may increase the likelihood of developing a depressive disorder include a family history of depression, major life changes, trauma, stress, and certain physical illnesses and medications. Depression is usually treated with lifestyle management, medications, psychotherapy, or a combination.

Medications

Antidepressants are medicines that treat depression. They may help improve the way your brain uses certain chemicals that control mood or stress. You may need to try several different antidepressant medicines before finding the one that improves your symptoms and has manageable side effects.

Psychotherapies

Psychotherapy (also called “talk therapy” or counseling) can help people with depression manage feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Examples of evidence-based approaches specific to the treatment of depression include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), interpersonal therapy (IPT), and problem-solving therapy.

Lifestyle Management

- Stay active and exercise.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Eat healthy foods and avoid non-prescription drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.
- Try to spend time with other people and confide in a trusted friend or relative.
- Join a support group. Try not to isolate yourself, and let others help you.
- Be patient. Expect your mood to improve gradually, not immediately.
- Continue to educate yourself about depression.

When you show signs of depression, postpone important decisions, such as getting married or divorced or changing jobs, until you feel better. Instead, discuss decisions with others who know you well and have a more objective view of your situation.



SUPPORTING SOMEONE WITH DEPRESSION

One of the most important things you can do to help a friend or relative with depression is to be compassionate, patient, and supportive through the treatment and recovery process. This can be challenging when the symptoms of depression can drain energy, optimism, and motivation to get the help they need.



LEARN ABOUT DEPRESSION

Learn how to offer support, understanding, and resources to cope with depression. Depression is a serious condition; one can't simply snap out of it.

ENCOURAGE TREATMENT

Some people may not recognize the symptoms of depression and think their feelings are normal. As a result, people feel ashamed and believe they should overcome it with willpower alone.

OFFER HANDS-ON ASSISTANCE

Offer to make or keep appointments, research treatment options, and stay on schedule with any treatment prescribed (if they are open to that support)

HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Having patience is important. Even with treatment, recovery doesn't happen overnight. You can't fix depression; recovery is personal and unique for everyone.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

"Put on your own oxygen mask before you assist anyone else." In other words, make sure your health and happiness are supported before trying to help someone depressed.



RESOURCES

01 Crisis Text Line

Text SILENCE to 707070 to be connected to a trained Crisis Counselor. The Crisis Text Line provides free, text-based support 24/7.

03 Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administrator (SAMHSA)

Call 1-800-662-4357 to access national information about local mental health services and treatment in your community. The federal agency that leads efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation.

05 Anxiety & Depression Association of America

Nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention, treatment, and cure of anxiety, depression, OCD, PTSD, and co-occurring disorders through the alignment of science, treatment, and education.

02 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call 1-800-273-8255 to access a national network of local crisis centers providing free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24/7.

04 The Trevor Project

Call 1-866-488-7386 to access crisis intervention and suicide prevention for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning youth. TrevorText START to 678-678.

06 Postpartum Support International

Call 1-800-944-4PPD (4773) to access non-emergency resources and education about the emotional changes that women experience during pregnancy and postpartum.



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Silence the Shame, Inc.
3000 Old Alabama Road, Suite 119
Alpharetta, GA 30022
404.596.6146
www.silencetheshame.com



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If you need to connect with someone,
text "**SILENCE**" to 741741