

What is Depression and What Can I Do About It?

What is depression?

Depression is more than the blues or the “blahs”. It is more than the every day ups and downs. When the “down” mood lasts for more than a couple of days, the condition may be clinical depression. There are various forms of depression. Some depressive episodes may begin suddenly for no apparent reason, while others can be associated with a life situation or stress. In bipolar disorder, the individual may have cycles of feeling down and alternates depression with being speeded up and reckless.

Why do people get depressed?

We do not yet know all the causes, but there seem to be biological and emotional factors that may increase the likelihood that an individual will develop a depressive disorder. Research has indicated a strong genetic link to depressive disorders.

When you are depressed...

You should ask for help if you’ve had five or more of the following symptoms for more than two weeks or if any of these symptoms cause such a big change that you can’t keep up your usual routine:

- You feel sad or cry a lot and it doesn’t go away.
- You feel guilty for no reason; you feel like you’re no good; you’ve lost your confidence.
- Life seems meaningless or like nothing good is ever going to happen again. You have a negative attitude a lot of the time, or it seems like you have no feelings.
- You don’t feel like doing a lot of the things you used to like – like music, sports, being with friends, going out – and you want to be left alone most of the time.
- It’s hard to make up your mind. You forget lots of things, and it’s hard to concentrate.
- You get irritated often. Little things make you lose your temper; you over-react.
- Your sleep pattern changes; you start sleeping a lot more or you have trouble falling asleep at night. Or you wake up really early most mornings and can’t get back to sleep.
- Your eating pattern changes; you’ve lost your appetite or you eat a lot more.
- You feel restless and tired most of the time.
- You think about death, or feel like you’re dying, or have thoughts about committing suicide.

Depression and Alcohol/Drugs

Many depressed individuals turn to drugs or alcohol to escape their pain and stress. Drugs and alcohol make the problems worse and lead to even bigger problems such as school failure or addiction.

What can I do if I am depressed?

If you are concerned about depression in yourself or a friend, **TALK TO SOMEONE** about it. There are people who can help you get treatment:

- A professional at the mental health center or Mental Health Association
- A trusted family member
- Your family doctor
- Your clergy
- A school counselor or nurse
- A social worker
- A responsible adult

How can I help a friend if they seem to be depressed?

- Offer help and listen
- Trust your instincts: If you think the situation is serious, seek prompt help. Break a confidence if necessary to save a life
- Pay attention to talk about suicide
- Seek professional help

Can depression be treated?

Yes. It is important that depressed teens receive prompt, professional treatment. Therapy can help individuals understand why they are depressed and learn how to cope with stressful situations. Depending upon the situation, treatment may consist of individual, group, or family counseling. Medications can be prescribed by a psychiatrist for some types of depression.

Who to contact for Mental Health Services:

- Your family physician
- A private mental health counselor or psychologist
- Your school counselor or school psychologist
- Peace River Center Crisis Line: 519-3744
- Winter Haven Hospital Access Line: 1 (800) 723-3248
- Lakeland Regional Medical Center Adolescent Program: 687-1275 or 687-1100
- Charter Hospital: 1 (800) 242-7837

Resources: National Institute of Mental Health, U.S. Government
National Association of School Psychologists
National Mental Health Association