

Feelings and emotions are all part of being human, and we will have our ups and downs. But when you're suffering from depression, it's hard to move on. In depression, problems feel life changing and *permanent*. There may not seem to be a way to make a change and things may even feel hopeless. If this is you, I'm sorry. Depression can wear you down and make you feel so alone. It can also make you physically sick. And, you know better than anyone, you can't just brush it away or cheer up when other people tell you to just, "be happy."

What is Depression and What Causes it?

Depression is a mood disorder with specific symptoms that continue for at least two weeks. It can range between mild to severe depending on the number and intensity of symptoms you have.¹

No one really knows what causes depression, but it is a common and serious illness.² It can be triggered by stresses in life, by physical and mental health problems, the environment, drinking, recreational drug use, and sometimes even some of your prescription medications. It can also run in families.

Untreated, depression can hang on for months or become *chronic*. But when treated, the symptoms and recurrence of depression can be reduced or managed.^{3,4} If you struggle with depression, you are not alone. Many adults have reported suffering from it, and women are almost *twice* as likely as men to have it.⁵ Only a healthcare provider can truly diagnose your depression, and they do it by looking at your medical history and assessing all of your symptoms.

How to Tell If You Need to See a Medical Provider

The funny thing about depression is that when it's bad enough to require help you may not feel like getting help for it. But getting help from your provider or counselor is exactly what you need to do. It's nothing to feel ashamed of. Because it may be hard for you to know if you need help, there is a personal assessment you can take. Just go to screening.mhanational.org and click "Take a Screen."

After taking the depression screen, if you had any of the symptoms for even a few days, then you should see your provider. But if you related to five or more of them in the same two-week period, and at least one of the symptoms was a depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure in things, then you could have a more serious form of depression. If so, then you should see your medical provider right away.⁶ *If you have had thoughts of hurting yourself or others, please call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK. Or go immediately to the nearest emergency room.*

How is Depression Treated?

As mentioned earlier, it's important to get treatment, and depression can be treated in a number of ways. Since it can be caused by so many different factors, treatment is as individual as you are. Depending on your circumstances and what triggered your depression, your health care provider will develop strategies to help you.

What Can You Do to Help Yourself?

If you are prone to depression, there are things you can do to help yourself get through it. They don't replace medical attention, but they can help while you get treatment.

- **Re-engage with life.** Get out of bed. Spend time outside. Start a hobby. Exercise.⁷

- **Reconnect with others.**⁷
- **Consider your diet.** What you eat can impact your mood.^{7,8}
- **Self-care.** Take a shower. Get dressed.⁷
- **Keep to a schedule.** Wake up to an alarm. Get a set amount of sleep each night. Schedule activities and things to do.⁹
- **Keep a journal.** Keeping a journal and recording each event that caused your depression will help you to see a pattern.

Suicide

Not everyone who is depressed will hurt themselves or commit suicide. But depression IS the most common condition associated with suicide.¹⁰ Risk factors are things that increase your likelihood of harming yourself. Your risk goes up when you feel hopeless and trapped in your pain. They go up more when you begin talking about your feelings of hopelessness, about not having a reason to live, about taking your life, or about how you will commit suicide.¹¹ If this is you, then please see your medical provider right away or call **911** or the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at **1-800-273-TALK**. Or go immediately to the nearest emergency room.

There is always a better way out of your pain or problems than suicide. You are valuable and with help, you can feel better, become more hopeful, and heal. If someone close to you or a trusted family member expresses concern, listen to them and seek help. If you don't know where to turn, then contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org or call them at **1-800-273-8255**. For help outside the U.S., visit Befrienders Worldwide at www.befrienders.org. The key to suicide prevention is to get *help*. What you're feeling now can be treated, and there are people waiting to help you through this hard time.

Resources include:

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8. Owens, Judith, et al. "Television-Viewing Habits and Sleep Disturbance in School Children." *Pediatrics*, vol. 104, no. 3, 1999, p. 27., doi:10.1542/peds.104.3.e27. Accessed 11/19/2019
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10. "We Can All Prevent Suicide." Lifeline, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, suicidepreventionlifeline.org/how-we-can-all-prevent-suicide. Accessed 11/12/2019

Other sources that influenced this lesson:

11. "What Is Depression?" *Psychiatry.org*, American Psychiatric Association, Oct. 2020, www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/depression/what-is-depression. Accessed 1/25/2022
12. "Major Depression." *Harvard Health*, Harvard Health Publishing Harvard Medical School, 18 Dec. 2018, www.health.harvard.edu/a_to_z/major-depression-a-to-z. Accessed 11/12/2019