



WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is one of the most common mental disorders. While depression causes feelings of sadness, it is more than just that. It is also a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, such as playing sports, socializing or being creative, and causes severe symptoms that negatively affect feelings, thoughts, and the ability to handle daily activities. If left untreated, depression can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems.

Each year 7.1% of adults in the United States have a major depressive episode and 1 in 6 adults will experience some type of depression in their lifetime. In 2020, depression occurred in 13% of children aged 12-17. Depression can occur at any time, but on average, it first appears during the late teens to mid-20s. Women are more likely than men to experience depression.

When treated correctly, people with depression can participate fully in their friendships and families and lead happy, productive lives.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Feelings of sadness, fear, worry, grief or “feeling low” are normal and appropriate responses to many situations. It is considered depression when these feelings persist for longer than two weeks and are coupled with other mild to severe symptoms such as:

- 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 once enjoyed.
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Loss of energy or increased tiredness.
- Appetite and/or weight changes.
- Moving or talking more slowly.
- Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.
- 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.

The symptoms listed above are all common for adults, but children with depression tend to mainly show signs of irritation, anger, aggression, tearfulness or unexplained aches and pains.

Not everyone who is depressed experiences every symptom. Some experience only a few symptoms while others experience many. The severity and frequency of symptoms and how long they last will vary depending on the person. Symptoms may also vary depending on the stage of the illness.

If you notice any combination of these signs and symptoms in yourself or your child that have lasted for longer than two weeks, seek help immediately.



RISK FACTORS FOR DEPRESSION

Depression can happen to anyone and can be difficult or impossible to prevent. However, a few groups are at higher risk for experiencing depression, including:

- People who have immediate family members with a history of depression.
- Those with chronic or severe medical conditions.
- People who face persistent discrimination or harassment, or who are facing adverse circumstances, such as communities of color, people with disabilities, people who are LGBTQ+, people who have lower incomes, and those who live in dangerous areas or are experiencing homelessness.

Depression can also be the emotional result of trauma or other life events that cause intense sadness, fear or worry such as the death of a loved one, divorce or a break-up of a relationship, job loss, financial stress, or being a victim of a crime or other life-threatening event. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating impact on mental health. A recent study showed depression rates were three times higher in early 2021 than before the pandemic and that people with lower incomes and minimal savings were at a greater risk.

People who lead a healthy lifestyle, have a strong support system, and use healthy coping strategies to get through stressful situations can have stronger mental health and therefore be less likely to experience depression or to at least be able to manage it. Addressing signs of depression and building these support systems can help prevent kids with depression from becoming adults with depression.

STIGMA VERSUS REALITY

Depression can unfortunately be associated with weakness or “being crazy.” Others may assume people with depression are lazy and moody, no longer want to live, cry all the time or cannot handle things. This can result in them being excluded from social circles, important family conversations or other important life events, which can make depression worse.

Often, people with depression feel embarrassed that they cannot just “get over it.” These feelings of personal embarrassment and fear of judgement or exclusion by others may prevent many people with depression from admitting to and seeking support for their condition. However, depression is manageable with proper treatment and support.

LEARN MORE

- Understanding Depression – Caregivers [Get the Facts](#) (SAMHSA)