

Depression

Everyone feels sad or low sometimes, but these feelings usually pass with time. Depression (also called major depressive disorder or clinical depression) is different. It can cause severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working. It is an illness that can affect anyone, regardless of age, race, income, culture, or education. Research suggests that genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological factors play a role in depression.

Common symptoms of depression include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of irritability, frustration, or restlessness
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies or activities
- Decreased energy, fatigue, or being “slowed down”
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Changes in appetite or unplanned weight changes
- Physical problems without a clear cause and that do not improve with treatment
- Suicide attempts or thoughts of death or suicide

How is depression treated?

Depression treatment typically involves medication, psychotherapy, or both. In milder cases of depression, treatment might begin with psychotherapy alone, and medication added if the individual continues to experience symptoms. For moderate or severe depression, many mental health professionals recommend a combination of medication and therapy at the start of treatment. Antidepressants take time to work – usually 4 to 8 weeks – and symptoms such as problems with sleep, appetite, or concentration often improve before mood lifts. It is important to give medication a chance before deciding whether it works.

How can I take care of myself?

Once you begin treatment, you should gradually start to feel better. Go easy on yourself during this time. Try to do things you used to enjoy. Even if you don't feel like doing them, they can improve your mood. Other things that may help:

- Physical activity – just 30 minutes a day of walking can boost mood.
- Maintain routines, including a regular bedtime and wake-up time.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Do what you can when you can, focusing on what is most important to you.
- Connect with people you trust and share your feelings. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) offers free in-person and online support groups where you can talk with people who have been through the same situations and understand. Information is available at www.nami.org.
- Postpone important life decisions until you feel better.
- Avoid using alcohol, nicotine, or drugs, including medications not prescribed for you.

How can I help a friend or family member who is depressed?

If someone you know has depression, help them see a health care provider or mental health professional. NAMI also offers support groups and resources for families and friends. Information is available at www.nami.org. You also can:

- Offer support, understanding, patience, and encouragement.
- Invite them out for walks, outings, and other activities.
- Help them stick to their treatment plan, such as setting reminders to take prescribed medications.
- Make sure they have transportation to therapy appointments.
- Remind them that, with time and treatment, the depression will lift.

If you or someone you care about is in crisis:

Call or text **988** to connect with the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](https://www.988lifeline.org/). The Lifeline provides free 24-hour confidential support to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Support is also available via [live chat](#).