

A Consumer's Guide to the Treatment of Major Depressive Disorder in Adults

Did You Know That...

... many famous people have had periods of depression.

... depression is a common disorder that affects up to 24% of women and 15% of men.

... depression is a serious but treatable condition.

What Is Depression?

Occasional feelings of unhappiness are common. These periods of “feeling blue” or “down in the dumps” usually do not last or require treatment.

Depression is a serious disorder that is different from normal periods of sadness. Depression lasts longer and does not go away on its own. Without proper treatment, depression can get worse and return.



The common signs of depression are:

- ▶ Constant feelings of sadness or emptiness
- ▶ Loss of interest or pleasure almost every day
- ▶ Weight gain or loss during the past month that is not due to dieting
- ▶ Too much or too little sleep
- ▶ Slowed movement or agitation
- ▶ Loss of energy or fatigue
- ▶ A nagging feeling of worthlessness or guilt
- ▶ Trouble with concentration, memory, or making decisions.

What Causes Depression?

Depression can have many causes. It occurs in people who worry too much, feel bad about themselves, feel out of control, or expect the worst. Major losses or disappointment can bring on depression when a person feels unable to handle a difficult situation. Depression can also come from an imbalance of the chemicals that control a person's mood.

But whatever its cause, depression is not a sign of weakness and it's nobody's fault.

How Do I Know if I'm Depressed?

Ask yourself the following questions:

During the past month have I often been bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?

During the past month have I often had little interest or pleasure in doing things?

If you answered “yes” to either question it is likely that you are depressed. Contact your doctor for an evaluation.

You should also contact your doctor if you answered “no” to both questions, but still think you are depressed.

Get professional help immediately if you are:

- suicidal
- have thoughts of hurting other, or
- are having trouble taking care of yourself.

**Call the toll-free number on your
insurance card for help in
choosing a healthcare provider.**

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Is Depression Treatable?

Yes. There are four types of safe and effective treatment for depression.

Psychotherapy is used to help a person with problems so they do not become depressed. Research has shown that two kinds of psychotherapy – interpersonal and cognitive-behavioral therapy – work well in treating depression. Other forms of psychotherapy are used to treat depression. Those forms of therapy have not been proven effective by scientific research.

Antidepressant medications are often used when depression seems to be a result of an imbalance in the chemicals that control a person's mood. The choice of antidepressant medication is based on your specific signs of depression as well as whether a particular medication has been helpful in the past. Sometimes a medication is combined with psychotherapy. This is helpful when a medication or psychotherapy alone is not effective.

Light therapy uses controlled exposure to specific levels of light to create relief from depression. It is used when there is a seasonal pattern to depression such as when depression occurs only between late Fall and early Spring. (Note: Not all benefit plans cover the purchase or rental of light therapy devices. Check your benefit plan for details.)

Electroconvulsive therapy used electrical stimulation under anesthesia to bring about improvement. It is reserved for the most severe forms of depression, or when other forms of treatment have not helped.



What Should I Do If I Think I'm Depressed?

Follow these 5 easy steps:

1. **Make a List** Write down your signs of depression along with any questions about depression and its treatment.
2. **Talk with a Healthcare Provider** Arrange an exam with a primary care physician or mental health professional. Share the list of signs and questions about depression and its treatment. Review any medication you may be taking.
3. **Select the Right Treatment** Ask your healthcare provider to describe the risks and benefits of all types of treatment. Also ask them to recommend the type of treatment that is most likely to help.
4. **Learn More About Depression** A healthcare provider or your local mental health association can suggest reading material on depression. They can also advise you of local support groups. Information about depression can also be found on the internet at:

Depression Central
(<http://www.psycom.net>)

National Depressive and Manic Depressive Association
(<http://ndmda.org>)
5. **Remain Actively Involved in Your Recovery** Keep your scheduled doctors appointments. If your doctor has prescribed medication for you, take it as prescribed. Tell your provider about any changes in your mood. Share any concerns about your recovery. Immediately tell your provider if you are:
 - Suicidal;
 - Have thoughts of hurting others;
 - Are having trouble taking care of yourself.