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## Depression

### **What is depression?**

Depression is a disorder that makes you sad, but it is different than normal sadness. Depression can make it hard for you to work, study, or do everyday tasks.

### **How do I know if I am depressed?**

Depressed people feel down most of the time for at least 2 weeks. They also have at least 1 of these 2 symptoms:

- They no longer enjoy or care about doing the things they used to like to do.
- They feel sad, down, hopeless, or cranky most of the day, almost every day.

Depression can also make you:

- Lose or gain weight
- Sleep too much or too little
- Feel tired or like you have no energy
- Feel guilty or like you are worth nothing
- Forget things or feel confused
- Move and speak more slowly than usual
- Act restless or have trouble staying still
- Think about death or suicide

If you think you might be depressed, see your doctor. Only someone trained in mental health can tell for sure if you are depressed.

### **See someone right away if you want to hurt or kill yourself!**

If you ever feel like you might hurt yourself or someone else, do one of these things:

- Call your doctor and tell them it is urgent
- Call for an ambulance by dialing 9-1-1
- Go to the emergency room at your local hospital
- Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

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## **What are the treatments for depression?**

People who have depression can get 1 or more of the following treatments:

- Medicines that relieve depression
- Counseling (with a psychiatrist, psychologist, nurse, or social worker)
- A device that passes magnetic waves or electricity into the brain

People with depression that is not too severe can get better by taking medicines or talking with a counselor. People with severe depression usually need medicines to get better, and might also need to see a counselor.

Another treatment involves placing a device against the scalp to pass magnetic waves into the brain. This is called "transcranial magnetic stimulation" or "TMS." Doctors might suggest TMS if medicines and counseling have not helped.

Some people whose depression is severe might need a treatment called "electroconvulsive therapy" or "ECT." During ECT, doctors pass an electric current through a person's brain in a safe way.

## **When will I feel better?**

Both treatment options take a little while to start working.

- Many people who take medicines start to feel better within 2 weeks, but it might be 4 to 8 weeks before the medicine has its full effect.
- Many people who see a counselor start to feel better within a few weeks, but it might take 8 to 10 weeks to get the greatest benefit.

If the first treatment you try does not help you, tell your doctor, but do not give up. Some people need to try different treatments or combinations of treatments before they find an approach that works. Your doctor or counselor can work with you to find the treatment that is right for you. They can also help you figure out how to cope while you search for the right treatment or are waiting for your treatment to start working.

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### **How do I decide which treatment to have?**

You and your doctor will need to work together to choose a treatment for you. Medicines might work a little faster than counseling. But medicines can also cause side effects. Plus, some people do not like the idea of taking medicine.

On the other hand, seeing a counselor involves talking about your feelings with a stranger. That is hard for some people.

### **Is depression the same for teenagers?**

No. The symptoms of depression are a little different for teenagers than they are for adults. Some teenagers are moody or sad a lot of the time. That makes it hard to tell when they are really depressed. Teenagers who are depressed often seem cranky. They get easily "annoyed" or "bothered." They might even pick fights with people. Also, when treating a teenager, doctors usually suggest trying counseling first, before trying medicine. That's because there is a small chance that depression medicines can cause problems for some teenagers. Even so, some depressed teenagers need medicine. And most experts agree that depression medicine is safe and appropriate to use in teenagers who really need it.

### **What if I take medicine for depression and I want to have a baby and/or breastfeed?**

Some depression medicines can cause problems for an unborn baby. But having untreated depression during pregnancy can also cause problems. If you want to get pregnant, tell your doctor but do not stop taking your medicines. If you have a baby and then develop depression symptoms, let your doctor know that as well. The two of you can plan the safest way for you to manage your symptoms and protect your baby.

It's also important to talk with your doctor if you want to breastfeed after your baby is born. Breastfeeding has lots of benefits for both mother and baby. Some depression medicines are safer than others to use while breastfeeding. But having untreated depression after giving birth can also cause problems, so do not stop taking your medicines. Your doctor can work with you to plan the safest way for you to feed your baby.

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### **What if I only have depression symptoms during certain times of the year?**

Seasonal affective disorder (often called "SAD") is a form of depression that comes and goes depending on the time of year. There are 2 main types of the disorder:

- **Fall-onset SAD:** This type of SAD starts in late fall and goes away in the spring and summer. Some people call it "winter depression." It is the most common form of SAD.
- **Spring-onset SAD:** This type of SAD starts in the spring and goes away in the fall and winter. Spring-onset SAD is much less common than fall-onset SAD.

Symptoms of SAD are similar to depression, but treatments are different. Treatment options include the following:

- **Light therapy:** Light therapy involves sitting in front of special, bright lamps during the day. This form of therapy can help people with fall-onset SAD. It must be done with help of a doctor or counselor who knows how to give the therapy. It's not something people should try to do on their own.
- **Medicines called antidepressants:** The same medicines used to treat depression can help people with SAD. There are many different antidepressant medicines that doctors can prescribe. The medicines work in different ways and can cause different side effects. If one medicine causes problems or does not work, there are often others to try. If the medicines work well, some patients stop and start the medicines every year, while other patients take the medicines all year round. The best plan for you will depend on your situation and preferences.
- **Counseling (also called "psychotherapy"):** Counseling can help with SAD. In addition, people with SAD who get counseling might be less likely to have their SAD come back in the following years.

Experts think that light therapy plus antidepressant medicines is often the best treatment to try first for fall-onset SAD. Some people with SAD are treated with only light therapy, but only if they are not severely depressed or thinking about suicide. For people who are severely depressed or thinking about suicide, antidepressant medicines might be a better option.