

October: Depression Recognition Month

Do you have a friend or family member that suffers with depression? Well, you are not alone. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, there are 17.3 million U.S. adults who have experienced an episode of major depression. Depression is an illness that involves the body, mood, and thoughts that affect the way a person eats, sleeps, thinks and behaves. Depression is a period of sadness, irritability, or low motivation that occurs with other symptoms. It lasts at least two weeks in a row, and is severe enough to negatively affect one's life. People suffering with depression cannot "pull themselves together" and get better, just like someone cannot will or make high blood pressure or diabetes away. Depression requires appropriate care and treatment.

Signs of Depression

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

- Loss of interest in activities that were once interesting or enjoyable
- Loss of appetite with weight loss or overeating with weight gain
- Loss of emotional expressions
- A persistently sad, anxious, or empty mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, social withdrawal
- Unusual fatigue, low energy level, feelings of being slowed down
- Sleep disturbances and insomnia, early morning awakening or oversleeping
- Trouble concentrating, remembering or making decisions; unusual restlessness or irritability
- Persistent physical problems such as headaches, digestive disorders, or chronic pain that do not respond to treatment
- Thoughts of death or suicide



Depression Treatment

Depression is a medical condition requiring medical care and even the most severe cases of depression can be treated. Treatment typically includes medication, therapy, or a combination of the two. Not everyone with depression is affected the same way and there is no "one size fits all" for treatment.

How to Help a Friend or Family Member That is Depressed

- **Listen to them.** Let your friend or family member know that you are there for them. Keep in mind that your friend/family member may want to talk about how they feel and not necessarily want advice.
- **Help find them support.** If your friend/family member is interested in counseling, encourage and support them to make their appointment. Even helping search for a counselor can be very helpful.
- **Be patient.** Depression usually improves with treatment, but it can be a slow process. Some antidepressants can take up to 6 weeks to become beneficial. Even with successful treatment, depression doesn't always go away entirely. Your friend/family member may continue to have symptoms from time to time. Avoid assuming a good day means they are "cured".
- **Stay in touch.** Let your friend/family member know that you care about them. People living with depression may become withdrawn and avoid reaching out. Even if you aren't able to spend a lot of time with them on a regular basis, check in regularly with a text, phone call, or a quick visit.
- **Educate yourself about depression.** Legitimate websites for the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) and the National Institute for Mental Health are great resources, along with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-272- 8255 (TALK).
- **Know the different forms depression can take.** Your friend/family member may seem to be in a bad mood, or feel exhausted a lot of time. Try to keep in mind that what their feeling can still be a part of depression.

When It's Time to Intervene

Depression can increase a person's risk for suicide or self-injury, so it is important to know how to recognize the signs.

Some signs that your friend/family member is having suicidal thoughts and needs **immediate help** include:

- Frequent mood swings or personality changes
- Talking about death or dying
- Purchasing a weapon
- Increased substance use
- Risky or dangerous behavior
- Getting rid of belongings or giving away treasured possessions
- Talking about feeling trapped or wanting a "way out"
- Pushing people away or saying they want to be left alone
- Saying goodbye with more feeling than usual

If you think your friend/family member is considering suicide, immediately take your friend/family member to an emergency room for a medical evaluation or immediately contact their therapist or primary care physician. ***When someone is appearing suicidal, there is no time to wait or holding off until they feel better.***

<https://www.healthline.com/health/how-to-help-a-depressed-friend>

<https://www.health.com/condition/depression/how-to-help-someone-whose-depressed?>

