

The Truth about Depression



Depression is a common but serious condition that affects an estimated 7 million Americans over the age of 65. Because the symptoms can often be mistaken with other health problems, depression in older adults can go overlooked and undertreated.

If you think you or someone you love is suffering from depression, it's important to remember these things:

- ▶ Depression is a medical condition with signs, symptoms and treatments.
- ▶ Depression is not a sign of weakness.
- ▶ Recognizing the signs and asking for help are the first steps to getting better.

Causes

There are many causes of depression and could include one or all of the following:

- Past trauma, such as an accident, injury or the sudden death of a friend or loved one
- Genetics
- Brain structure or chemistry
- Life events, such as the loss of friends, family and independence
- Side effects caused by prescription medications or illegal drug or alcohol abuse
- Chronic illness, disease or pain
- Hormone changes

Symptoms

If you answer “Yes” to one or more of these questions, you may be experiencing depression.

In the past two weeks, have you:

- Lost interest or pleasure in things you once cared about?
- Felt down or hopeless?
- Noticed you're eating too much or not enough?
- Had thoughts about death or suicide?
- Had trouble making everyday decisions?
- Had problems sleeping or wanting to sleep all the time?
- Felt anxious or irritable?

Treatment

Your doctor is here to help. If depression is a concern for you, talk to your doctor so that, together, you can make a plan to help you feel better. Treatments may include:

- Therapy
- Lifestyle changes, such as exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet
- Making time for fun activities and spending time with family and friends
- Finding ways to improve your sleep
- Avoiding alcohol and misuse of prescription medications or recreational drugs
- Antidepressant medications

The Truth about Depression (Cont.)

What You Can Do to Ease Depression

Stay Connected

When you're not engaged in life or feel alone, you're more likely to become depressed or make your depression worse. It can be hard finding the energy, but staying connected to people, your body and your goals will go a long way in easing your depression.

Stay connected to others.

- Make time for friends and family. Set a regular coffee date, for example.
- Call someone if you are feeling sad or thinking about suicide.
- Find a support group at your church or community or senior center.
- Do not isolate yourself.

Stay connected to your body.

- Get regular exercise.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Get seven to nine hours of sleep.
- Do not use drugs or alcohol to escape your feelings.

Stay connected to your goals.

Set small goals that are easy to meet and try to reach them. For instance, if you find it hard to get out of bed, tell yourself you'll be up at 9 a.m. each day for week – and then do it!

Keep Going

Depression doesn't follow a straight path – it's more like a rollercoaster with many ups and downs. If you don't feel better right away after starting treatment or you feel yourself slipping back into depression after feeling better for a while, don't give up! Keep going and keep doing the things you and your doctor have talked about that will help you manage depression.

Keep going to counseling.

Keep taking your medications as directed.

- Antidepressant medications take a couple weeks to work. If you miss a dose or stop taking your medication, you may not feel better.
- If you want to stop taking your medication because you feel better, don't feel like it's working or don't like the side effects, talk to your doctor first. **Never stop taking your medication without your doctor's supervision.**

Keep learning about depression.

- Learning about depression will remind you that depression is a treatable problem and that it's not a sign of weakness.
- You'll also learn about the newest treatment options so you can discuss them with your doctor.

Resources

National Institutes of Health depression basics website:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression/index.shtml>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

SCAN Health Plan® Mental Health TeleTalk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTEQakfJ6U4>