

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Everyone feels down or blue at times. Feelings of sadness may go away over time, but when these feelings linger and interfere with your daily activities you need to consider whether you are suffering from depression.

What Causes Depression?

Depression may be caused by many things, including:

- ▶ Genetics
- ▶ Other general medical illnesses
- ▶ Certain medicines
- ▶ Drugs or alcohol
- ▶ Other psychiatric conditions
- ▶ Stressful life events
- ▶ Recent significant loss

Depression is not something to be ashamed of, nor is it your fault. It is not a personality weakness or character flaw. It is a medical illness. You cannot “snap out of it” any more than you can “snap out” of a medical illness, but, there are things you can do to take control.

Depression is Treatable

To keep you healthy, your health care provider relies on information from you. You need not feel rushed or embarrassed when talking to your health care provider about feeling depressed. Your provider is there to help you. Your health care provider will determine if there is a physical cause for your depression.

The earlier you get treatment for your depression, the sooner you will begin to feel better. As with other medical illnesses, the longer you have the depression before you seek treatment, the more difficult it can be to treat.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

800.826.3632 | dbsalliance.org

Through this organization and its Web site, you can obtain information about depression and bipolar disorder, and access a directory of support groups and confidential screening tests.

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)

800.950.NAMI (6264) | nami.org

This is a self-help, support, and advocacy organization of consumers, families, and friends of people with severe mental illness.

National Institute of Mental Health

866.615.6464 | nimh.nih.gov

This organization provides information about the symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of mental illnesses, including brochures and information sheets, reports, press releases, fact sheets, and other educational information.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

National Mental Health Information Center

800.789.2647 | samhsa.gov

This organization provides information about federal, state, and local organizations dedicated to treating and preventing mental illness.

For more information and referrals for treatment, go to thfp.com or call Member Services at the number on your Tufts Health Freedom Plan member ID card.

Your primary care provider can also be a helpful resource.

Behavioral Health

DEPRESSION



WHAT ARE SOME SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION?

- ▶ Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy
- ▶ Problems concentrating, thinking, remembering, or making decisions
- ▶ Feeling sad, blue, or down in the dumps
- ▶ Feeling worthless or guilty
- ▶ Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- ▶ Increase or decrease in appetite or weight
- ▶ Loss of energy or feeling tired all of the time
- ▶ Thoughts of death or suicide
- ▶ Irritability

With any depression, there are often other physical or psychological symptoms, such as headaches, other aches and pains, digestive problems, sexual problems, and being anxious or worried. Depression may also be expressed through anger outbursts or risky behavior. In some situations people may not even be aware they are depressed. They are able to work and manage their lives, but they may feel irritable and stressed.

How Do I Know if I am Depressed?

If you think you might be depressed, ask yourself these two questions:

- ▶ Over the past two weeks, have you felt down, very sad or hopeless?
- ▶ Over the past two weeks have you felt less interest in doing things?

If you answered yes to either or both of these questions, you should schedule an appointment with your health care provider to discuss the possibility that you may have depression. Your health care provider can help you determine next steps for you to take to start to feel better. (adapted from the Patient Health Questionnaire-2, PHQ-2)

Treatment For Depression

Depression can be treated in a variety of ways:

PSYCHOTHERAPY (TALK THERAPY): This is an important part of treatment. A good therapist can help you cope with the feelings you are having and change the patterns that contribute to your depression.

ANTIDEPRESSANT MEDICATIONS: They work to alleviate the symptoms you are experiencing. Some people may experience side effects from the medication, but these are usually temporary. Talk with your prescriber if this happens to you

ANTIDEPRESSANT MEDICINE COMBINED WITH PSYCHOTHERAPY: For some people, either medicine or psychotherapy may be enough; for others, a combination of the two treatments is most effective.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES: For many people healthy eating, exercise, relaxation techniques and other wellness activities can also contribute to improving one's mood.

When You Are Taking Antidepressant Medication

Since new medication may take several weeks to work, it is recommended that you have at least three follow-up visits with your prescriber in the first three months. This will insure that your prescriber has chosen the right medication for you and can adjust the dosage and help manage any side effects that you may have. You may need to try a couple of different medications to find one that works for you.

If these appointments have not been scheduled, you should call your healthcare professional who prescribes your medication to make the follow-up visits.

It is important to keep your follow-up appointments and take your medication as prescribed. A common misunderstanding is that if you start to feel better you no longer need to take your antidepressant medication. However, if you stop taking the medication too soon, you may start to feel the same symptoms again. Your medication is key to your recovery. It is very important that you talk to your prescriber before stopping or changing an antidepressant medication.

Depression is usually treated in two steps.

Acute treatment: The aim of acute treatment is to remove the symptoms of depression until you feel well.

Continuation treatment: Continuing the treatment for some time after you are well is important because it keeps the episode of depression from coming back.