

## Depression

Everyone has days when they feel down, sad, unmotivated, or “blah.” It is natural to have changes in mood related to life events, relationship problems or other circumstances.

However, when changes in mood become dramatic, frequent and interfere with our ability to function at work and/or home it may signal depression. There is a lot of scientific research which links depression to biochemical imbalances and changes in the body; it is important to remember both the medical and psychological aspects of depression. A person’s life may seem wonderful on the outside, but internally it can be a very different story. One cannot ‘snap out’ of a depression so it is crucial to be understanding of others and oneself if you or someone you know is struggling with depression. Remember that the person is doing the best they can.

### Signs of Depression Include:

- Feeling down and empty
- Easily frustrated or irritable
- Decreased interest/pleasure in activities
- Eating/sleeping changes
- Isolating self or reducing social contact
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Worthlessness
- Excessive guilt
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate

## Treatment Can Help

Do you wonder if you are experiencing depression? First, talk to your clinician/doctor about your symptoms to get a professional opinion. Your doctor should do a medical exam to make sure that another physical problem isn’t causing the symptoms. The doctor may refer you to a mental health specialist. Depressive disorders are generally treated psychotherapy, medication, or both.

In some cases, persons experiencing depression may feel so hopeless that they have thoughts of suicide. For this reason, it is incredibly important to tell someone if you are feeling chronic or severe depression or experiencing suicidal thoughts, and to seek out help as soon as possible. Medical and talk therapy treatment can be helpful and can lead to long term change and improvement.

### Psychotherapy

A type of psychotherapy called cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is especially useful for treating depression and anxiety. CBT is typically provided in 12-20 sessions and teaches different ways of thinking, behaving, and reacting to situations that help him or her feel less anxious and worried. Improved coping skills are one major outcome of CBT.

### Medication

Doctors also may prescribe medication to help treat anxiety. Any decision regarding the use of medication should be made with your doctor. Talk with your doctor about the best treatment for you.

## Commonly occurring mood disorders include:

- **Major depressive disorder** is characterized by a persistent feeling of sadness with many of the above symptoms for more than two consecutive weeks. The depressed mood might be accompanied by frequent crying spells, and a sense of worthlessness and/or helplessness. A person who experiences a major depression often loses interest in activities which were previously interesting and important to them, struggling to motivate. Everyday responsibilities can feel huge and insurmountable. People may either lose sleep or sleep excessively to the point that it is difficult to get out of bed.
- **Postpartum depression** is a serious problem that many women might experience after giving birth. Women with postpartum depression experience full-blown major depression during pregnancy or after delivery (postpartum depression). The feelings of extreme sadness, anxiety, and fatigue that accompany postpartum depression can be difficult as it can interfere with a new mother's bonding with her baby.
- **Seasonal affective disorder** is a type of depression which occurs during the winter months, when there is less natural sunlight. This depression generally lifts during spring and summer. Winter depression, typically accompanied by social withdrawal, increased sleep, and weight gain, and tends to recur on a yearly basis.
- **Bipolar disorder** is a type of mood disorder. Once called manic-depression, bipolar disorder is characterized by alternating episodes of depression and heightened moods which can lead a person to feel excited, sleepless, possible of grand things and impulsive. Bipolar disorder can be effectively treated with a consistent combination of medication and talk-therapy.

## Resources

**Anxiety and Depression Association of America:** [adaa.org](http://adaa.org)

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**, available 24 hours everyday: 1-800-273-8255

**National Alliance on Mental Illness:** [www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Anxiety-Disorders](http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Anxiety-Disorders)