

# Depression

Depression refers to feeling sad, low, down in the dumps, blue, gloomy, or empty. In general, there are two kinds of depression:

1. Normal sadness or normal grief. This kind of depression is one that we all feel from time to time after upsetting life experiences, such as the loss of a job or the ending of a relationship. This kind of depression is considered normal, is short lived, and resolves within a few days to 2 weeks. Depression experienced after the loss of a loved one (*bereavement*) often lasts longer than 2 weeks but normally gets better with time.
2. Clinical depression. This kind of depression lasts longer than normal sadness or normal grief or interferes with your ability to function at home, at work, and in school. It also interferes with your personal relationships. It affects almost every aspect of your life. Clinical depression is an illness.

Symptoms of depression can also be caused by conditions other than those mentioned above, such as:

- Physical illness. Some physical illnesses, including underactive thyroid gland (*hypothyroidism*), severe anemia, specific types of cancer, diabetes, uncontrolled seizures, heart and lung problems, strokes, and chronic pain are commonly associated with symptoms of depression.
- Side effects of some prescription medicine. In some people, certain types of medicine can cause symptoms of depression.
- Substance abuse. Abuse of alcohol and illicit drugs can cause symptoms of depression.

## SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of normal sadness and normal grief include the following:

- Feeling sad or crying for short periods of time.
- Not caring about anything (*apathy*).
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much.
- No longer able to enjoy the things you used to enjoy.
- Desire to be by oneself all the time (*social isolation*).
- Lack of energy or motivation.
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering.
- Change in appetite or weight.
- Restlessness or agitation.

Symptoms of clinical depression include the same symptoms of normal sadness or normal grief and also the following symptoms:

- Feeling sad or crying all the time.
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness.
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.
- Thoughts of suicide or the desire to harm yourself (*suicidal ideation*).
- Loss of touch with reality (*psychotic symptoms*). Seeing or hearing things that are not real (*hallucinations*) or having false beliefs about your life or the people around you (*delusions* and *paranoia*).

## **DIAGNOSIS**

The diagnosis of clinical depression is usually based on how bad the symptoms are and how long they have lasted. Your health care provider will also ask you questions about your medical history and substance use to find out if physical illness, use of prescription medicine, or substance abuse is causing your depression. Your health care provider may also order blood tests.

## **TREATMENT**

Often, normal sadness and normal grief do not require treatment. However, sometimes antidepressant medicine is given for bereavement to ease the depressive symptoms until they resolve.

The treatment for clinical depression depends on how bad the symptoms are but often includes antidepressant medicine, counseling with a mental health professional, or both. Your health care provider will help to determine what treatment is best for you.

Depression caused by physical illness usually goes away with appropriate medical treatment of the illness. If prescription medicine is causing depression, talk with your health care provider about stopping the medicine, decreasing the dose, or changing to another medicine.

Depression caused by the abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs goes away when you stop using these substances. Some adults need professional help in order to stop drinking or using drugs.

## **SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:**

- You have thoughts about hurting yourself or others.
- You lose touch with reality (have psychotic symptoms).
- You are taking medicine for depression and have a serious side effect.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

- National Alliance on Mental Illness: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)
- National Institute of Mental Health: [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

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