



# Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program  
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## Understanding Depression

**Everyone gets down in the dumps from time to time. But you may suffer from clinical depression if a feeling of sadness or loss of interest in life and friends lingers for two weeks or more. Depression can occur at any age and occurs in both men and women.**

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), depression can be categorized into three general forms:

- **Major Depression:** In a major depressive episode, the symptoms interfere with the ability to work, study, sleep, eat, and enjoy once pleasurable activities. This is depression can be disabling and may occur only once in a lifetime, but it is common for it to occur several times.
- **Persistent Depressive Disorder:** This type of depression is less severe though more chronic and diagnosed if depression lasts for at least 2 years in adults, and 1 year in children and adolescents. The symptoms do not prevent a person from carrying on daily activities, but they do interfere with a person functioning well and feeling good.
- **Bipolar Depression:** This is also called manic-depressive illness. In this form, a person cycles through mood changes varying from severe highs to deep depressions, and can have psychosis in extreme manic episodes.

This article describes the first two types listed above.

A combination of factors causes depression, according to the National Foundation for Depressive Illness, Inc. Some cases are triggered by a stressful experience, such as the death of

a spouse or loss of a job. Some illnesses, such as heart attack or cancer, also can cause depression as can alcohol and drug abuse. Being vulnerable to depression may be inherited and events such as stresses at home, work, or school, cause the depression to occur.

The NIMH says women experience depression about twice as often as men. Some reasons may be related to hormonal cycles—particularly menstrual cycle changes, pregnancy, miscarriage, postpartum period, pre-menopause, and menopause. Many women also face stresses such as responsibilities both at work and home, single parenthood, and caring for children and for aging parents. Although men are less likely to suffer from depression than women, the rate of suicide in men is four times that of women, though more women attempt it.

### Signs of depression

An adult who's depressed will have at least three or more of these symptoms nearly every day, all day (or much of the day), for at least two weeks (symptoms in children may be different):

- Loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities once enjoyed, feeling "empty".
- Feeling sad, blue, hopeless or down in the dumps.
- Fatigue and lack of energy.
- Sleep problems, including waking up early in the morning, or sleeping too much.
- Change in appetite that result in weight loss or gain.
- Being anxious, pessimistic, or worried.
- Feeling guilty, helpless, or worthless.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or a suicide attempt.
- Physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain.

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Symptoms in children may include: pretending to be sick, refusing to go to school, clinging to a parent, worrying that the parent may die, sulking, getting into trouble at school, being negative, grouchy, and feeling misunderstood. It may be difficult to tell if these symptoms are a temporary phase, or depression. Take your child to his or her pediatrician, if you, a teacher, or someone else who knows the child well are concerned.

### Getting help

Up to 80% of depressed people can be treated successfully. Most people receiving treatment for depression begin to feel better within six weeks.

Recognizing that you could be depressed is the first step toward feeling better. Once you decide to get help, see your doctor to determine if there are health or medication-related reasons for your symptoms. After an exam, your doctor may refer you to a mental-health specialist for further treatment.

The usual treatment involves an antidepressant medication. The medication changes the chemical balance in the brain, which helps improve mood, sleep, appetite and concentration. Psychotherapy or counseling also may be useful, to help you deal with major life changes, emotions, perceptions and personal problems.

If prescription medications are part of your treatment, take them as prescribed and don't stop taking them without consulting your doctor.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises health care providers, patients, families and caregivers of adults and children that they should closely monitor all patients beginning therapy with antidepressants and when doses are either increased or decreased, for worsening depression and suicidal thinking. The FDA also advises that these patients be observed for certain behaviors associated with these drugs, such as anxiety, agitation, panic attacks, insomnia, irritability, hostility, impulsivity, severe restlessness, hypomania and mania, and that physicians be particularly vigilant in patients who may have bipolar disorder.

### Self-help ideas

Try these self-help steps recommended by NIMH in addition to taking medication or going to counseling:

- Expect your mood to improve gradually, not immediately.
- Postpone important decisions until the depression has lifted.
- Exercise regularly. Walking, bicycling, jogging, dancing, and doing other aerobic exercise can improve your mood.
- Don't abuse substances. Alcohol and illegal drugs are closely linked to depression. Their use can contribute to or worsen your condition.
- Talk to someone. Talking with a friend or family member about events and situations that are causing you stress can help you gain perspective.
- Join a support group. Talking to people can be very useful. Many hospitals and community mental health centers sponsor self-help support groups.

For more information, visit the National Foundation for Depressive Illness Inc. website at [www.depression.org](http://www.depression.org). Also remember that your EAP is here for you and your family, 24/7, to provide telephonic support and counseling referrals which are covered under your EAP benefit. Please reach out to us at (800) 777-4114 if you need help.

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