

Understanding Depression

There are many kinds of depression. Depression can develop quickly or slowly over weeks or months. In some cases, depression can become chronic or long term. Some people have depression for shorter periods of time (episodic).

Depression is not a weakness, and is not something a person is making up.

Signs of Depression

Many people think depression means feeling sad or down. There are other signs of depression. **Signs of depression include:**

- Problems concentrating
- Do not feel like eating or eating too much
- Feeling tired
- Sleep problems
- Feeling guilty or worthless
- Stop doing the things you enjoy

Why We Feel Depressed

There are many things that can cause depression including our biology, physical health, surroundings, relationships, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors.

Long-term stress, challenging life events, and medical illness can be big part. Things can often happen at the same time or spiral together in a way that may lead to more symptoms of depression.

How to Cope With Depression

The depression spiral can be changed and turned around for the better. The following methods have been shown to help many people.

1. Get Moving: Exercise and Doing Activities You Enjoy

When you feel depressed, you may become less active. You may cut down on exercise, social activities, or things you used to enjoy.

As a first step to treating depression, it is helpful to have more activity. When you exercise, your body releases endorphins. Endorphins are natural feel good chemicals. Research shows that exercise is an effective treatment for depression.

You will have a better chance of success if you plan specific activities. For example, you can plan and set a reminder for tomorrow at 7am to walk your dog around the neighborhood for 30 minutes.

Activities you choose can be as simple as:

- A 10-minute walk outside
- Taking a bath
- Gardening
- Reading a book
- Talking to a close friend
- Listening to music

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2. Look Out for Negative Self-Talk

Depression causes patterns in how we think. These can keep us in a depressed mood. People who feel depressed have negative thoughts about themselves (self-criticism), the world (negative feeling about how things are), and the future (hopelessness).

Pay attention to what you are thinking and ask yourself if this thinking is helping or hurting you. If it is making your mood worse, here are some things you can do:

- **Look at the facts (evidence) for and against the negative thought.**

Is it really true? Can this really happen? What are the real chances it may happen? Are you blaming yourself for something you cannot control? Are you assuming things before you know all the facts? Are you ignoring your strengths and the positive things about yourself?

- **Explore the negative thought and look for other ways to think about it.**

Ask yourself how you may look at things in a different way. How might it look 5 years from now? Allow yourself to see the situation from more than one view. How may a family member, friend, or someone you admire see the same situation?

- **Use the best friend method.** What would you tell your best friend if they had these same thoughts? Would you think as badly about them as you think about yourself?

3. Talk to a Trained Professional

Therapy can help change how you think and cope with life's challenges. It can also help you learn more about yourself and help you to change some habits or behaviors.

Therapy is also known as counseling. **There are many kinds of therapy**, including cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), interpersonal therapy, and problem-solving therapy. Therapy can be used on its own or with medications to treat depression.

4. Talk with Your Doctor About Medications

Anti-depressant medications can help people with moderate or severe symptoms of depression. They change brain chemicals to improve mental health.

Common kinds of these medications are Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) and Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs). Examples are:

- Escitalopram (Lexapro) SSRI
- Sertraline (Zoloft) SSRI
- Fluoxetine (Prozac) SSRI
- Duloxetine (Cymbalta) SNRI

Medications may take a few weeks to start working. It is often recommended to take them for at least 6 months.