**Depression: Symptoms**

Depression can present different symptoms, depending on the person. But for most people, depressive disorder changes how they function day-to-day, and typically for more than two weeks. Common symptoms include:

* Changes in sleep
* Changes in appetite
* Lack of concentration
* Loss of energy
* Lack of interest in activities
* Hopelessness or guilty thoughts
* Changes in movement (less activity or agitation)
* Physical aches and pains
* Suicidal thoughts

**Depression: Causes**

Depression does not have a single cause. It can be triggered by a life crisis, physical illness or something else—but it can also occur spontaneously. Scientists believe several factors can contribute to depression:

* **Trauma**. When people experience trauma at an early age, it can cause long-term changes in how their brains respond to fear and stress. These changes may lead to depression.
* **Genetics**. Mood disorders, such as depression, tend to run in families.
* **Life circumstances**. Marital status, relationship changes, financial standing and where a person lives influence whether a person develops depression.
* **Brain changes**. Imaging studies have shown that the frontal lobe of the brain becomes less active when a person is depressed. Depression is also associated with changes in how the pituitary gland and hypothalamus respond to hormone stimulation.
* **Other medical conditions**. People who have a history of sleep disturbances, medical illness, chronic pain, anxiety and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are more likely to develop depression. Some medical syndromes (like hypothyroidism) can mimic depressive disorder. Some medications can also cause symptoms of depression.
* **Drug and alcohol misuse**. [21%](https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2018-nsduh-detailed-tables)of adults with a substance use disorder also experienced a major depressive episode in 2018. Co-occurring disorders require coordinated treatment for both conditions, as alcohol can worsen depressive symptoms.

**Depression: Diagnosis**

To be diagnosed with depressive disorder, a person must have experienced a depressive episode lasting longer than two weeks. The symptoms of a depressive episode include:

* Loss of interest or loss of pleasure in all activities
* Change in appetite or weight
* Sleep disturbances
* Feeling agitated or feeling slowed down
* Fatigue
* Feelings of low self-worth, guilt or shortcomings
* Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
* Suicidal thoughts or intentions

**Depression: Treatments**

Although depressive disorder can be a devastating illness, it often responds to treatment. The key is to get a specific evaluation and treatment plan. Safety planning is important for individuals who have suicidal thoughts. After an assessment rules out medical and other possible causes, a patient-centered treatment plans can include any or a combination of the following:

* **Psychotherapy** including cognitive behavioral therapy, family-focused therapy and interpersonal therapy.
* **Medications** including antidepressants, mood stabilizers and antipsychotic medications.
* **Exercise**can help with prevention and mild-to-moderate symptoms.
* **Brain stimulation therapies** can be tried if psychotherapy and/or medication are not effective. These include electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) for depressive disorder with psychosis or repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS) for severe depression.
* **Light therapy**, which uses a light box to expose a person to full spectrum light in an effort to regulate the hormone melatonin.
* **Alternative approaches** including acupuncture, meditation, faith and nutrition can be part of a comprehensive treatment plan.