

## Some facts about depression



Depressive disorders are common: they affect an estimated 9.5 percent of adult Americans in a given year, or about 19 million people.

Depressive disorders often begin between ages 15 and 30 but also can appear in children.

Depression (not including bipolar disorder) is the leading cause of disability among men and women of all ages in the U. S. and worldwide according to the World Health Organization's *World Health Report, 2001*.



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## **DEPRESSION**

*A treatable illness*



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# Depression: A treatable illness



Depression is a serious medical condition that involves the body, mood and thoughts. It affects the way a person eats and sleeps, the way one feels about

oneself and the way one thinks about things. A depressive disorder is not the same as a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness nor a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with depressive illness cannot merely “pull themselves together” and get better. Without treatment, symptoms may last for weeks, months or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help most people who have depression.

## Types of depression

Depression comes in different forms, just like other illnesses such as heart disease, cancer or diabetes. The three main depressive disorders are: major depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder and bipolar disorder.

**Major depression** (or major depressive disorder) is manifested by a combination of symptoms that interfere with the ability to work, study, sleep, eat and enjoy once pleasurable activities. A major depressive episode may occur only once, but it is more common for several episodes to occur in a lifetime. Chronic major depression may require a person to continue treatment indefinitely.

A less severe type of depression, **dysthymia** (also called dysthymic disorder), involves long-lasting symptoms that do not seriously disable, but keep someone from functioning well or feeling good. Many people with dysthymia also experience major depressive episodes during their lives.

Another type of depressive illness is **bipolar disorder** (or manic-depressive illness). Bipolar disorder is characterized by cycling mood changes: severe highs (mania) and lows (depression), often with periods of normal mood in between. When in the depressed cycle, an individual can have any or a few of the symptoms of depression. When in the manic cycle, the person may be overactive, overtalkative and have a great deal of energy. Mania often affects thinking, judgment and social behavior in ways that cause serious problems or embarrassment.

## Treatments

More than 80 percent of people with depressive disorders improve when they receive appropriate treatment. The first step to getting treatment is a physical examination by a physician to rule out other possible causes for the symptoms. Next, the physician should conduct a diagnostic evaluation for depression or

refer the patient to a mental health professional for this evaluation.

Treatment choice will depend on the patient’s diagnosis, severity of symptoms and preference. A variety of treatments, including medications and short-term psychotherapies, have proven effective for depression.

## Symptoms of depression

- ◆ Persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood
- ◆ Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- ◆ Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- ◆ Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- ◆ Decreased energy, fatigue, being “slowed down”
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- ◆ Trouble sleeping, early morning awakening, or oversleeping
- ◆ Appetite or weight changes
- ◆ Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- ◆ Restlessness, irritability
- ◆ Persistent physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive disorders and chronic pain that do not respond to routine treatment