



Adult Mental Health Division

Depression English



What is Depression?

About 9 percent of people in the United States suffer from depression. Yet, thanks to years of research, there are now medications and treatments such as "talk therapy," that can help. Unfortunately, many people do not recognize that depression is treatable. If you or someone you care about is feeling sad, empty, helpless, tired, or having trouble sleeping, eating, concentrating, enjoying life, or having thoughts of death then the information presented here can help you understand depression better and take the steps needed to help you or the person you care for.

Depression in Your Culture

If your culture has a way of understanding depression that is different from what is presented here, please tell your doctor, nurse, or case manager so that we know from your point of view what might have caused the depression, the cultural healers in your community, and the treatments from your cultural or spiritual background. Also if you want an interpreter to help you in talking to your doctor, just let your case manager know and one will be provided at no cost to you.

Types of Depression

Depression comes in different forms, just like with other illnesses such as heart disease. Below we talk about three of the most common types of depression.

Major depression is shown by symptoms that interfere with the ability to work, study, sleep, eat, and enjoy life. This type of depression may occur only once but more commonly occurs several times in a lifetime.

A less severe type of depression is called *dysthymia*. It involves long-term and serious symptoms but it's not as bad as major depression, yet it still prevents people from feeling good or being happy. Many people with *dysthymia* also experienced major depression at some time in their lives. Another type of depression is *bipolar disorder*, also called *manic-depressive* illness. Not nearly as common as other forms of depression, bipolar disorder is characterized by emotional changes: highs (mania) and lows (depression). Sometimes the mood switches are fast, but most often they are slow. When in the depressed cycle, the person can have any or all of the symptoms of major depression (lows). When in the manic cycle (highs), the individual 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 and embarrassment. For example, the individual in a manic phase may think they are famous or rich and make unwise business decisions or have romantic affairs. Mania, left untreated, may worsen to deeper mental illness, like schizophrenia.

Causes of Depression

Some researchers say depression is genetic and that it runs in families. Other researchers say that stress at home, work, school or the loss of a loved one can cause depression. Also people who have low self-esteem, who always view themselves and everybody else in a negative way or someone who is always complaining or angry are prone to depression. Researchers have also shown that medical illnesses such as a heart attack or cancer can cause depression. We believe that depression is a combination of genetic, mental, spiritual, and environmental factors.



Evaluation and Treatment

The first step in getting good treatment for depression is a physical examination by a physician. A good evaluation will include a complete history of symptoms -- when they started, how long they have lasted, how severe they are, whether the patient had them before and, if so, whether the symptoms were treated and what treatment was given. The doctor will ask about alcohol and drug use, and if the person has thoughts about death or suicide.

Further, a history should include questions about whether other family members have had depression and, if treated, what treatments they may have received and which treatments worked.

Last, an evaluation should include a mental status examination to determine if speech, thought patterns, or memory have been affected, as sometimes happens with depression and mania.

Treatment Choice

Treatment choice will depend on the outcome of the evaluation. There are a variety of medications that can help and talking with someone who understands depression can help you think about depression differently and learn ways to manage it. Some people with mild depression may do well with talk therapy and not need medication. People with more severe depression could benefit from medication. Most people do better with combined treatment, such as medication (to gain quick relief) and talk therapy (to learn better ways of dealing with life's problems and stressors).

Keep in mind that treatments from your cultural or spiritual background, such as prayer or a specific cultural practice could also be considered along with medication and talk therapy.

For more information about depression, contact a mental health clinic near you, or call your case manager directly.