

Take *Positive Action* Against Depression



Treat It and Live Again

Almost 20 million Americans suffer from some form of depression. Most of those with depression are unable to function properly. Fortunately, depression is a disorder that can be treated.

People with depression are often unable to take charge of their situation. Their thinking is unclear. They do not have a positive frame of mind and do not seek treatment. If you think you have depression, don't "go it alone." Ask your family and friends to help you take these first positive steps.

- *Visit your doctor*
- *Discover why you feel the way you do*
- *Take the medicines your doctor prescribes*
- *Participate in therapy sessions*

This brochure may help you and your family and friends recognize depression. Together, you can then take positive action against it.

What Is Depression?

Depression is not a brief feeling of the "blues" or a "funk." You cannot wish it away or "pull yourself together." When you have depression you may not feel like eating. You don't sleep well. It is almost impossible to work and be with family and friends. You have negative feelings about yourself and the world around you.

Having depression does not mean you are a weak person, however. Your negative feelings are the symptoms of the illness. Much like a runny nose is a symptom of a cold. Both of them tell you that things are not normal. You need help to relieve the symptoms and make you feel better.

There are three common types of depression.

1. **Major depression** makes it nearly impossible to function normally.
2. **Dysthymia** is a less severe form of depression. You may still be unable to function well or feel good.
3. **Bipolar disorder** occurs when people have moods that swing between highs (mania) and lows (depression). In the mania mood, people may have too much energy and talk too much. Mania can lead to poor decisions and behavior that may be embarrassing.





What You Feel When You Have Depression

The ways you feel when you have depression are the symptoms of the illness. Some people have more of these symptoms, others less.

- Constant feeling of being sad or “empty”
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling guilty or worthless
- Loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed
- Less energy
- Unable to concentrate or make decisions
- Unable to sleep or sleeping too much
- Weight loss or gain; overeating
- Thinking about death or suicide

Remember, everyone has these feelings once in a while. Someone with depression will have these feelings all the time and will not be able to lead a normal life.

Causes of depression.

Major depression and bipolar disorder can be passed from one generation to the next. Stress at home, work, or school may also be a cause. Changes in how your brain works can bring on depression. Illnesses such as stroke, heart attack, and cancer can affect how you feel, too. Often, problems with relationships and money or a major change in your life can cause feelings of depression.

Women have depression about twice as much as men. Hormonal changes and women’s multiple roles in society are some sources of depression.

Men are less likely to admit they have depression. Men with depression don’t usually feel hopeless or helpless. They are more often angry and discouraged. Depression in men can also increase the risk for physical illnesses, such as heart disease.

Depression is not a normal part of growing older. In fact, most senior citizens are satisfied with their lives. It is not always easy to diagnose depression in older people.

Diagnosing depression in children can also be difficult. It is not unusual for a child to pretend to be sick, refuse to attend school, or cling to a parent. When your child behaves or feels this way most of the time, take your child to the doctor.



Regain Your Life With Proper Treatment

Take back your life from depression with the help of healthcare professionals.

1. Visit your doctor. Tell him or her about your symptoms and feelings and how long you've felt this way.
2. The doctor will give you a complete physical exam to be sure your symptoms are not caused by a physical illness.
3. A psychological exam will help the doctor pinpoint the cause of your depression and the correct treatment.
4. Treatment choices will depend on the outcome of your examination.

There are many kinds of treatments to help you control your depression. Most of them are either medicines or various therapies. People with moderate to severe depression most often benefit by taking medicines called antidepressants. People with mild depression may benefit most from therapy. A combination of treatment is best for most people. The medicines relieve symptoms quickly. Therapy helps people to learn how to manage life's problems and stresses.

There are also many types of psychotherapies.

- Some are called "talking" therapies. Health care professionals will help you understand why you feel the way you do and how to resolve problems in your life.
- Behavior therapies will help you make changes in your life. You can feel more satisfied and in control.
- Other types of therapies will help you with personal relationships or negative thinking.

There are several types of antidepressant medications.

A common class of antidepressant medications is the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, also known as SSRIs. Serotonin is an important chemical in the brain. People with depression have low levels of serotonin. SSRIs increase the amount of serotonin in the brain. SSRIs cause fewer side effects than MAOIs and other types of antidepressants.

MAOIs are monoamine oxidase inhibitors. Monoamines are substances in the brain. Low amounts of monoamines lead to depression. Monoamines help to send messages to the brain. They are destroyed after they finish sending messages. MAOIs stop the monoamines from being destroyed. The higher levels of monoamines then relieve the symptoms of depression.

Sometimes doctors will try a variety of antidepressants before finding the most effective medication or combination of medications. Sometimes dosages must be increased to be effective. Patients who are prescribed MAOIs will have to avoid certain foods, such as cheese, wine, and pickles.

Lithium has been the common treatment for bipolar disorder. It levels the mood swings. Lithium must be carefully monitored. Mood-stabilizing anticonvulsants are also beneficial medications for people with bipolar disorder. Most people with bipolar disorder take a combination of medications.

Your health care provider will guide you through a program to treat your specific form of depression. Help your health care provider help you!

- Return to your health care provider after your initial diagnosis for appropriate follow-up.
- Continue taking any medications your health care provider prescribes until he or she tells you otherwise.



Take *Small Steps* and Help Yourself

It isn't easy to make a plan and follow it when you are depressed. However, by taking small steps, you can help yourself.

- Set realistic goals
- Take responsibility for small tasks
- Divide large tasks into smaller ones
- Don't be alone, try to be with other people
- Try some activities you enjoy to feel better
- Do some mild exercise

Take these small steps to help yourself. You're likely to feel a little better everyday.

Family and friends are important, too.

Family and friends are important supporters for someone who has depression. Take these positive steps to help the depressed person.

- Convince him or her to see the doctor
- Make the appointment and take them, if necessary
- Encourage him or her to stay with the doctor's treatment
- Make sure he or she takes all medicines
- Offer emotional support
- Be patient and understanding
- Invite the depressed person to take a walk or participate in pleasurable activities
- Go slow. Help the depressed person take small steps
- Don't ever blame him or her for being depressed

For more information, contact the National Institute of Mental Health

Phone: 301-443-4513

Web site: www.nimh.nih.gov

E-mail: nimhinfo@nih.gov

References:

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