

# Teen Depression

## Depression

Clinical depression is a serious medical condition. It is not something you have made up in your head. It is more than just feeling “down” or “blue” for a few days.

Depression can include feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness and even thoughts of suicide. These feelings can go on for weeks or months. Depression can change your mood and your thoughts, leaving you feeling stuck in a rut. It can even affect how often you become ill, or how well you heal from a major illness.

Depression can affect your grades or attendance at school, your relationships with family and friends, and can lead to self-harm or dangerous behaviors such as alcohol, drug or unsafe sexual behaviors.

About 4 percent of teens become seriously depressed each year. Depression can be treated. If left untreated, it can get worse, last longer and keep you from enjoying life.

Having depression is like having a physical illness. It can and should be treated.

## Symptoms

Depression in teenagers does not always present the way it does in adults. A teenager may seem very angry, irritable or be getting into more trouble when in fact, he or she is actually depressed.

If you have had five or more of the following symptoms for more than 2 weeks, please call a health care provider. You do not need to feel ashamed or embarrassed.

Symptoms can include:

- feeling sad, anxious or “empty”
- feeling hopeless, negative or both
- feeling guilty, worthless, helpless or all three
- feeling irritable or restless
- losing interest in activities or hobbies you once enjoyed
- feeling tired or having less energy than normal
- trouble concentrating, remembering details or making decisions
- trouble falling asleep, waking up early or sleeping too much
- change in appetite and weight
- thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- aches and pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems that do not go away with treatment.

## Causes

Depression can be caused by a single life-changing event such as a trauma, a death or divorce in the family, moving, breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, a major illness or an imbalance in brain chemistry. Depression can affect anyone at any age.

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## Talk to Someone

It is common for teenagers to react to the pain of depression by turning to alcohol, other drugs or sex. Other common reactions include:

- getting into trouble at school
- not getting homework done
- avoiding social activities and friends
- problems with family and friends.

You are not alone. If you think you may have depression, talk to someone. Talk to a trusted adult, family member, close friend or your health care provider. There are people who can help you get treatment.

## Suicidal Thoughts or Attempts

Most people who are depressed do not commit suicide although depression does increase the risk for suicide or suicide attempts. It is not true that people who talk about suicide do not attempt it. Any thoughts, remarks or attempts at suicide are serious. **Please get help right away if you think about or are considering suicide, or harming yourself or anyone else in any way.**

## Treatments

Having depression does not mean you are weak or a failure. You are not alone. Depression can be treated. You can be helped by:

- **self-care**
  - Set realistic goals for your progress. Your recovery may take time. If you have a task that seems too large, break it into smaller parts.
  - Reward yourself when you reach a goal.
  - Learn about depression. Your health care provider, therapist or school counselor can suggest resources.
  - Look for healthy activities that make you feel better. Maybe start a hobby or take classes.

- Keep a journal of your progress. Make notes about how you are feeling.
- Try to keep an active social life.
- Do mild exercise.
- Eat healthful meals and snacks. Include a protein choice at breakfast and drink water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages throughout the day.
- Think about how family problems, losses or other upsetting events may add to your depression.
- Do not blame yourself. This will make depression worse. Remember that depression is a medical condition. It is not your fault.
- Try to spend time with other people. Talk with a trusted friend or relative. Try not to be alone. Let others help you.

- **talk therapy:**

Talking with a therapist can help you work through mental health challenges and emotions.

- **medicine:**

Antidepressants help keep your brain chemicals in balance to regulate your mood. You and your primary care provider can decide which medicine is right for you. (Please be patient. It may take a few weeks before you feel better.)

## What to do in a Crisis

**Never leave someone in crisis alone. If you or someone close to you is in crisis, call:**

- **the toll-free, 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).**
- your primary care provider
- 911 or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department. (Ask a family member or friend to help you.)

**Information adapted from the National Institute of Mental Health.**