

# Clinical Depression

Clinical depression, also known as depression, can start as the blues. Everyone gets the blues from time to time, which usually results from stressful events and lasts only a short time. A bad day or an argument can make you feel sad for a while.

Every year, more than 19 million Americans suffer from depression. It strikes men, women and children of all races and economic groups.

If sadness lingers or affects your daily routine, you may have more than just the blues. For some people, sadness or stress can lead to depression and can affect every part of life.

Depression interferes with the way we eat, sleep and live our lives. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months or years. Depression is a serious health problem that affects feelings, thoughts and actions, can be life-threatening and can include symptoms of physical illness such as headache, stomach pain or tiredness.

Depression often goes untreated for many reasons. Sometimes people don't recognize the early warning signs or think they have a physical problem. Sometimes people think they should be able to "just get over it." Depression is not something you can "get over." The good news is that most people who get adequate treatment can recover.

## Causes of depression

Researchers do not know the specific cause of depression. There is a theory that some people inherit a tendency to have an imbalance in

mood-controlling brain chemicals. Major losses or disappointments can make this imbalance worse, leading to depression.

Depression is an illness just like heart disease or any other medical illness; it is not a sign of weakness. People suffering from depression cannot just "snap out of it." Depression is no one's fault.

## Depression checklist

Common signs of depression:

- Constant feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or emptiness.
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed.
- Weight gain or loss that is not on purpose.
- Slowed movement or restlessness.
- Too much or too little sleep.
- Loss of energy.
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering things or making decisions.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.



If you experience these symptoms for longer than two weeks or if the symptoms interfere with your daily routine, you may be suffering from depression. Contact your health care provider for a thorough evaluation.

### Treatment is available

The most effective and common treatments for depression are:

- **Psychotherapy.** This involves talking with a behavioral health professional (therapist) about ways to cope with challenges in your life. Research has shown that psychotherapy can be effective within just a few months.
- **Antidepressant medication.** Medicines can help correct an imbalance in the brain chemicals that affect a person's mood. Most medicines can be used safely but should be prescribed by an experienced doctor who knows how it might affect other medicines you are taking. Be sure to tell your doctors about all of your medical conditions and all of your current medications. Most people will see signs of relief after several weeks.

- **A combination of the two.** This approach combines “talk therapy” with antidepressant medication and can be more effective than either medicine or psychotherapy alone.

Other treatments are available and can be discussed with your health care provider.

### What should I do if I think I'm depressed?

Follow these five steps:

1. Make a list. Write down any signs of depression you experience, along with your questions about depression and its treatment.
2. Talk with a health care provider. Arrange a visit with your doctor or behavioral health professional. Share your list of signs and questions about depression and its treatment. Review any medications you are currently taking.
3. Select the right treatment. Ask your health care provider to describe the risks and benefits of treatment. Also ask him or her to recommend the type of treatment that is most likely to help you.

4. Learn more about depression. Your provider or mental health association can provide information on depression and local support groups. You can also get information from:

*National Mental Health Association*  
1-800-969-NMHA (6642)  
[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

*National Institute of Mental Health*  
1-800-421-4211  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

*Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance*  
[www.dbsalliance.org](http://www.dbsalliance.org)

5. Update your provider about your progress. Once you are in treatment, make sure that your provider knows if you are feeling better or worse. Ask questions about your progress. Do not stop taking any medicine when you start to feel better. Never stop taking medicine without first talking with your doctor.