

# What is Depression?

## **Depression**

Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think, and how you act. Fortunately, it is also treatable. Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease your ability to function at work and at home.

Depression symptoms can vary from mild to severe and can include:

- Feeling sad or having a depressed mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Changes in appetite — weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue
- Increase in purposeless physical activity (e.g., inability to sit still, pacing, handwringing) or slowed movements or speech (these actions must be severe enough to be observable by others)
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Symptoms must last at least two weeks and must represent a change in your previous level of functioning for a diagnosis of depression.

Also, medical conditions (e.g., thyroid problems, a brain tumor, or vitamin deficiency) can mimic symptoms of depression so it is important to rule out general medical causes.

Depression affects an estimated one in 15 adults (6.7%) in any given year. And one in six people (16.6%) will experience depression at some time in their life.

Depression can occur at any time, but on average, first appears during the late teens to mid-20s. Women are more likely than men to experience depression. Some studies show that one-third of women will experience a major depressive episode in

their lifetime. There is a high degree of heritability (approximately 40%) when first-degree relatives (parents/children/siblings) have depression.

► More resources and information on Depression are available through the American Psychiatric Association (APA) website including:

- How depression is different from sadness or grief/bereavement
- Risk factors for depression (i.e., biochemistry, genetics, personality, environmental factors)
- Ways that depression is treated (e.g., medication, psychotherapy)
- Self-help and coping

► Go to the American Psychiatric Association webpage [What is Depression webpage](https://www.psychiatry.org/what-is-depression)

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