

Depression



Depression is a mood disorder characterized by a persistent depressed mood or loss of interest and pleasure in activities that are normally pleasurable, for at least 2 weeks. People with depression have considerable difficulties with daily functioning and activities in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other areas.

The symptoms of depression appear on many levels:

Mood:

- Persistent feeling of sadness, anxiety, or feeling numb and empty
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, irritability, excessive guilt
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities

Thinking:

- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Persistent negative thoughts
- Beliefs of worthlessness or helplessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts

Behavioral:

- Observable agitation, withdrawal or physical restlessness
- Talking or moving more slowly than usual

Physical:

- Significant change in appetite or weight (decrease or increase)
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or sleeping too much
- Multiple persistent physical symptoms with no clear cause, including:
 - aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems
 - Fatigue or loss of energy

Treatment of Depression:

- Physical examination by a PHC provider to rule out other possible explanations for the symptoms or a physical condition that can resemble or exacerbate depression.
- Comprehensive assessment by a social worker, who can make a referral to a psychiatrist and psychologist if needed, and provide regular treatment follow up, and ongoing psychosocial support, including: problem solving counseling, helping to engage in activities, strengthening social supports, and provision of psychoeducation to the person and their caregivers.

- Evidence-based brief psychological interventions effective for treatment of depression, such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Interpersonal Individual or Group therapy.
- Psychiatric evaluation and medication: possible prescription of antidepressants that reduce the symptoms' intensity.

Recommendations for the person and family:

Even if it is difficult, it is important to try to do as many of the following:

- Start again (or continue) activities that were previously pleasurable.
- Maintain a regular sleeping and waking times pattern
- Be as physically active as possible (e.g., sports, exercise or even just walking).
- Eat regularly despite changes in appetite.
- Spend time with trusted friends and family.
- Participate in community and other social activities as much as possible.
- Do not delay seeking help if suicidal or self-harm thoughts occur.

How to help someone cope with stress and difficult life situations:

- Give the person a chance to talk, preferably in a private place, and listen in a supportive way.
- Help the person solve problems with the help of community services/resources.
- If you think the person may be experiencing any type of abuse (such as domestic violence) or neglect (e.g., caregivers not meeting basic needs of children and or older persons), help them contact legal, protection and social resources, if needed.
- Identify supportive family and community members and involve them as much as possible, if appropriate.
- Build on the person's strengths, resources and abilities, and encourage them to resume previous social activities, as much as possible.

Did You Know?

- Depression is very common and can happen to anyone.
- There are many misconceptions about depression, maybe because depression is not a visible condition, like a fracture or a wound. There is also the misconception that people with depression can easily control their symptoms by sheer willpower. It is important to keep in mind that the occurrence of depression does not mean that the person is weak or lazy.
- Negative attitudes of others (e.g., "You should be stronger", "Pull yourself together") can make the person with depression feel worse.
- A regular and consistent occurrence of even "some" of the symptoms described in this booklet is enough to seek help or encourage a loved one to seek help.

- People with depression tend to have unrealistically negative opinions about themselves, their life and their future. Their current situation may be very difficult, but depression can cause unjustified thoughts of hopelessness and worthlessness. These views are likely to improve once the depression improves.
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide are common. If a person notices these thoughts, they should not act on them, but should tell a trusted person and seek help immediately from a mental health professional.
- Depression, even the most severe cases, can be treated. The earlier that treatment can begin, the more effective it is.
- No two people are affected the same way by depression and there is no one-size-fits-all for treatment. It may take some trial and error to find the treatment that works best for you.
- Regular follow-up can help against re-emergence of symptoms.