

What You Can Do About Depression

Develop a healthier, more balanced diet. Junk food, caffeine, alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes can all have a negative impact on your mood.

Get regular exercise and sufficient sleep. For exercise, walking is fine. The times when you don't feel like exercising may be when you need to do it most. Cutting yourself short on sleep can really contribute to a downward spiral in other areas.

Develop stress-management and time-management skills. These will be very helpful in surviving school and keeping yourself from feeling overwhelmed.

Check in with how you're feeling regularly. Learn to be aware of your feelings; don't let them build up to the point where they overwhelm you, bring you down, and cause even bigger problems in your life.

Develop and use a support system. Everyone goes through difficult periods in their lives. If you're experiencing one of these times, don't be afraid to talk about it with someone you care about. Let him or her know what you need: "I don't need you to fix my problems, I just need somebody to listen" or "I just want to vent and blow off some steam."

Depression can leave you feeling helpless and out of control of your life, your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The goal is to get to the point where you feel like you can do something to improve your situation and life. So any changes you can make for the better, though they may not "fix" the depression or make it go away immediately, are definitely worth doing.

Remember, depression IS treatable.

Additional Readings

Breaking the Patterns of Depression by Michael D. Yapko (New York, Doubleday, 1997). (Available at UT Libraries)

The Depression Workbook: A Guide for Living With Depression and Manic Depression by Mary Ellen Copeland and Wayne London (Oakland: New Harbinger, 1992).

Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy by David Burns (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1980). (Available at UT Libraries; also at UHS Health Promotion Resource Center.)

The Feeling Good Handbook by David Burns (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1989). (Available at UHS Health Promotion Resource Center.)



Depression

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How to Know if You are Depressed

Depression has been called "the common cold of mental health." We all know that everybody feels down or pessimistic from time to time. That's normal.

Many people wonder, "When does feeling down cross the line into depression?" That's a tough question, because it's not always an either-or kind of thing. In considering whether you need help with depression, it might be useful to consider the following three dimensions: frequency, severity and duration.

Three Dimensions of Depression

1. **Frequency:** How often do you feel down or depressed? Every day? Three times a week? Once a month? All the time?
2. **Severity:** How bad is it? Do you feel suicidal? Totally hopeless and stuck in a dark hole? Or just kind of lousy and negative?
3. **Duration:** How long does it last? Until you see your partner? Until you go home for the weekend? Just a couple of hours? Does it drag on for days, weeks, or even months? Have you felt somewhat depressed your whole life?

Common Symptoms of Depression

Physical

- sleeping much more or much less than usual
- eating much more or much less than usual
- feeling fatigued, lacking energy
- frequent headaches, stomachaches, or otherwise inexplicable aches and pains

Behavioral/Attitude

- diminished interest in and enjoyment of previously pleasurable activities, such as going out with friends, sports, hobbies, sex, etc.
- difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- neglecting responsibilities and personal appearance

Emotional

- depressed mood-this can mean feeling down, irritable, pessimistic, guilty, anxious, empty, etc.
- suicidal thoughts
- feeling hopeless and helpless
- feelings of worthlessness

Possible Contributing Factors to Depression

Environmental: Cramped living conditions, bad roommate situation, money problems, having a tough time with classes, too much pressure on you, feeling helpless to change your environment, loss of something significant, being victimized.

Interpersonal: Relationship problems or breakup, conflicts with family members, death of a significant person in your life, feeling like people are taking advantage of you, unresolved anger or guilt, feeling helpless to make changes in important relationships.

Physical/Medical/Biological: Genetic predisposition (depression runs in the family), chemical imbalances, dealing with illness or infection, sleep deprivation, chronic anxiety.

Diet/Exercise: Getting by on fast food, sugar, caffeine, alcohol, and other relatively non-nutritious items, substance abuse, lack of exercise.

Thought Patterns: Self-criticism, pessimistic thinking, expecting the worst.

Spiritual/Existential/Philosophical: Doubts about the meaning of life, questions about your own religious beliefs, a sense that you're somehow missing out on your true calling or that you're not being true to yourself, your dreams, your beliefs.