Depression
Signs & Symptoms
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What is Depression?

Depression is an illness that causes you to feel sad, to lose interest in activities that you’ve always enjoyed, to withdraw from others, to feel lethargic and become irritable. Depression can also cause people to feel hopeless about the future and even to think about suicide. It’s different from normal feelings of sadness, grief, or low energy. It can be prolonged and sometimes has no apparent reason for onset.

Most experts believe a combination of family history and stressful life events may cause depression. These can include childbirth, a death in the family, work, financial or relationship difficulties. A long-term health problem such as anemia or an underactive thyroid gland can also cause depression. Treating the cause of problems that lead to a depressive mood can usually lift the depression.

A certain level of stress can be useful, it helps us to learn coping skills and build resilience. However, if the feelings of irritability, sadness and hopelessness persist or are so intense that they interfere with normal life activities or you are unable to identify the cause of your stress and low mood then you may be suffering from depression.

Many people, and sometimes their families, feel embarrassed or ashamed about having depression. Don’t let these feelings stand in the way of getting treatment. Remember that depression is not caused by personal weakness and is not a character flaw it is a common illness and can affect anyone.

If you think you may be depressed, tell your doctor. Treatment can help you enjoy life again. The sooner you get treatment, the sooner you will feel better.

What Are The Signs And Symptoms Of Depression?

Clinical depression is not something you feel for a day or two before feeling better. In true depressive illnesses, the symptoms last weeks, months, or sometimes years. If you are depressed normal every day tasks can seem overwhelming. Some people experience feelings of apathy and are unable to find pleasure in activities they used to enjoy.
Symptoms of Depression

The symptoms of depression vary from person to person, and they may vary in severity over time.

You may be suffering from a major depressive episode if you have a depressed mood for at least two weeks and have at least five of the following clinical symptoms:

- Feelings of intense sadness
- Crying spells
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Significant increase or decrease in appetite
- Significant weight loss or weight gain
- Change in sleep pattern: inability to sleep or excessive sleeping
- Agitation or irritability
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- A tendency to isolate from friends and family
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness or excessive guilt
- Aches and pains – depression can exacerbate many physical symptoms such as headaches, backaches, abdominal pains
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Thoughts of Death or Suicide

People suffering from depression often show distorted thinking. Everything looks bleak to them, and they hold extremely negative views about themselves, their situation, and the future. Trapped in their pessimism, they brood/obsess over their problems and blow them out of proportion. Feeling hopeless and helpless, they may even start to see suicide as their only way out.

Suicidal thoughts are a symptom of severe depression, and must always be taken seriously. If someone you know is threatening suicide or talking of wanting to hurt him/herself, seek professional help right away.

How Do The Signs And Symptoms Of Depression Differ In Different Groups?

Depression is expressed differently according to one’s age, sex, and culture. For example, a teenager is unlikely
to exhibit the same signs of depression as an elderly person would. An awareness of these differences helps ensure that the problem is recognised and treated early.

Teen Depression

Depression in children and adolescents can look quite distinct from that of adults. Irritability rather than depression is frequently the predominant mood. A depressed child or teenager may be hostile, grumpy, or easily lose his or her temper. Unexplained aches and pains, such as headaches and stomach-aches, are also common symptoms of depression in children and teens. Other signs include pretending to be sick, refusing to go to school, getting into trouble, clinging to a parent, or worrying that the parent may die.

Depression in Women

Rates of depression in women are twice as high as they are in men. This is due in part to hormonal factors, particularly when it comes to premenstrual syndrome (PMS), premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD). When it comes to symptoms, women are more likely than men to experience pronounced feelings of guilt, sleep excessively, overeat, and gain weight. Women are also more likely to suffer from seasonal affective disorder.

Depression in Men

Depressed men are less likely than women to acknowledge feelings of self-loathing and hopelessness. Instead, they tend to complain about fatigue, irritability, sleep problems, and loss of interest in work and hobbies. In young males anti-social behaviour may be a symptom of depression. Some other symptoms of depression in men include anger, aggression and violence, reckless behavior, and substance abuse. Men may also try to cope with their depression by throwing themselves into their work.

Depression in Older Adults and the Elderly

The difficult changes that many older adults face, such as bereavement, loss of independence, and health problems, can lead to depression, especially in those without a strong support system. However, depression is not a normal part of ageing. Older adults tend to complain more about the physical rather than the emotional symptoms of depression, and so their mood disorder
often goes unrecognised. But depression in the elderly is associated with poor health, a high mortality rate, and an increased risk of suicide, so diagnosis and treatment are extremely important.

What Are The Different Types Of Depression And Their Symptoms?

Types of Depression

There are several different types of clinical depression (mood disorders that include depressive symptoms):

- **Major depression** is characterised by a change in mood that lasts for weeks or months. It is one of the most severe types of depression. It usually involves a low or irritable mood and/or a loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities. It interferes with normal functioning and often includes physical symptoms. A person may experience only one episode of major depressive disorder, but often there are repeated episodes over an individual’s lifetime.

- **Typical depression** is a common subtype of major depression. It features a specific symptom pattern, including a temporary mood lift in response to positive events. You may feel better after receiving good news or while out with friends. However, this boost in mood is fleeting. Other symptoms of atypical depression include weight gain or significant increase in appetite, sleeping excessively, a heavy feeling in the arms and legs, and sensitivity to rejection. Depression may manifest itself as symptoms of physical illness for which no underlying cause can be found.

- **Dysthymia** is less severe than major depression but usually goes on for a longer period, often several years. There are usually periods of feeling fairly normal between episodes of low mood. The symptoms usually do not completely disrupt normal activities.

- **Bipolar disorder** involves episodes of depression, usually severe, alternating with episodes of extreme elation, which is called mania. This condition is sometimes called by its older name, manic depression. The depression that is associated with bipolar disorder is often referred to as bipolar depression. When depression is not associated with bipolar disorder, it is called unipolar depression.
• **Seasonal depression** - Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, is depression that occurs only at a certain time of the year, usually winter, when the number of daylight hours is lower. It is sometimes called “winter blues.” Although it is predictable, it can be very severe.

• **Postpartum Depression** Many new mothers suffer from some fleeting form of the “baby blues.” Postpartum depression, in contrast, is a longer lasting and more serious depression which is thought to be triggered by hormonal changes associated with having a baby. Postpartum depression usually develops soon after delivery, but any depression that occurs within six months of childbirth may be postpartum depression.

• **Psychotic depression** refers to the situation when depression and hallucinations or delusions are experienced at the same time. This may be the result of depression that becomes so severe that it results in the sufferer losing touch with reality. Individuals who primarily suffer from a loss of touch with reality (for example, schizophrenia) are thought to suffer from an imbalance of dopamine activity in the brain and to be at risk of subsequently becoming depressed.

• **Adjustment disorder** is a state of distress that occurs in relation to a stressful life event. It is usually an isolated reaction that resolves when the stress passes. Although it may be accompanied by a depressed mood, it is not considered a depressive disorder.

Some people believe that depression is “normal” in people who are elderly, have other health problems, have experienced tragedies, or have challenging life situations. However, clinical depression is always abnormal and always requires attention from a medical or mental-health professional. The good news is that depression can be diagnosed and treated effectively in most people. The biggest barriers to overcoming depression are recognition of the condition and seeking appropriate treatment.
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<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Lack of social support</td>
<td>Social support serves as a protective factor against depression. People who are isolated and have few friends or family members to turn to in times of stress are more likely to develop depression.</td>
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<td>Recent stressful life experience</td>
<td>When people are going through stressful experiences that overwhelm their coping skills, depression often results.</td>
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<td>Previous history of Depression</td>
<td>If you’ve had an episode of major depression before, you are at increased risk of having another episode. The probability of having a recurrence increases with each major depressive episode.</td>
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<td>Family history of Depression</td>
<td>If depression runs in your family, your risk for depression is higher. Your risk is particularly high if one of your close relatives, such as parent or sibling, has depression.</td>
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<td>Lower socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Research has shown that low socioeconomic status is associated with increased rates of depression. People with lower levels of income, education, and occupational status face many obstacles and stressors that likely contribute to this risk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Underlying emotional or personality disorder</td>
<td>People with pervasive emotional difficulties or personality disorders are vulnerable to depression.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronic medical condition</td>
<td>Ongoing medical problems or chronic pain can lead to depression. Adamant.</td>
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<td>Female sex</td>
<td>Women are twice as likely to experience depression as men.</td>
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<td>Advanced age</td>
<td>People over the age of 65 are more vulnerable to depression.</td>
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How Is Depression Treated?

The most common approach for the treatment of depression involves some type of psychotherapy, antidepressant medication, or a combination of the two.

Psychotherapy
In psychotherapy for depression, you are taught the facts about your depressive disorder and how to manage it. Working with a mental health professional, you will learn how to cope with negative feelings, identify and change distorted thinking patterns, improve your relationships with others, and deal with problems constructively. You may also explore the underlying causes of your depression. Talk therapy can be pursued in an individual, group, couples, or family setting.

Antidepressant Medication
A variety of medications are used in the treatment of depression. Antidepressants typically take up to 4-6 weeks to reach their full effectiveness. Drug treatment may cause unwanted side effects, so educating yourself about your medication is important.

Self-Care
Once you are being treated for depression, or just to maintain a positive outlook, you can make lifestyle changes that may prevent depression from returning.

- Try to identify and focus on activities that make you feel better. It is important to do things for yourself
- Don’t isolate yourself. Take part in activities even when you may not want to. Keeping active can actually make you feel better
- Try to maintain a positive outlook and keep things in perspective. Having a good attitude can be beneficial
- Talk with your friends and family. Communicating and discussing your feelings is an integral part of your treatment and will help with your recovery. Consider joining a support group or online forum
- Regular exercise and proper diet are essential to good physical and mental health. Exercise has been found to increase the levels of the body’s own natural antidepressants called endorphins
- Try to get enough rest and maintain a regular sleeping pattern
- Avoid drinking alcohol or using any illicit substances, these can increase the feelings of depression
**FURTHER BOOKLETS AVAILABLE FROM THE IRISH ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY**

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