

What Is Depression?

Depression is an illness that causes a person to feel sad and hopeless much of the time. It is different from normal feelings of sadness, grief or low energy.

Anyone can have depression. It often runs in families. But it can also happen to someone who doesn't have a family history of depression. You can have depression once or many times.

If you think you may be depressed, tell your doctor. There are good treatments that can help you enjoy life again.

What Causes Depression?

The causes of depression are not entirely understood. Things that may trigger depression include:

- Major events that create stress, such as childbirth or a death in the family.
- Illnesses, such as arthritis, heart disease or cancer.
- Certain medicines, such as steroids or narcotics for pain relief.
- Drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs.

These and other factors can cause certain brain chemicals to get out of balance. As soon as the imbalance is corrected, symptoms of depression generally go away.

What Are The Symptoms?

Depression can cause different symptoms in different people, and they may be hard to notice at first. For example, a child may seem grouchy and irritable. An older adult may be forgetful. If you think a loved one is depressed, learn more about what symptoms to look for, and urge the person to get help if needed. People who are depressed may:

- Think and speak more slowly than normal.
- Have trouble concentrating, remembering and making decisions.
- Have changes in their eating and sleeping habits.
- Lose interest in things they enjoyed before they were depressed.
- Have feelings of guilt and hopelessness, wondering if life is worth living.
- Think a lot about death or suicide.
- Complain about problems that don't have a physical cause, such as headache and stomachache.

All of these symptoms can impact your quality of life. If you have had a few of these symptoms for at least two weeks, talk to your doctor. You may have depression that requires treatment.

How Is Depression Treated?

Depression is usually treated with counseling or antidepressant medicine, or both. It sometimes takes a few tries to find the right treatment, and it can take several weeks for the medicine to start working. Try to be patient and stay with your treatment.

If you have mild or moderate depression, you may be diagnosed and treated by your family doctor and a therapist or psychologist. If you have severe depression or do not respond to treatment, it may be helpful to see a psychiatrist. This is a medical doctor who specializes in mental health problems. Severe cases of depression may need to be treated in the hospital.

Let your doctor know if you believe you are depressed because depression is often overlooked. If you are diagnosed with depression, you and your doctor can decide on the best treatment.

How Common Is Depression?

Many people will have depression at some point in their lives. Chances of becoming depressed are higher for certain people. For example:

- Women have depression twice as often as men. But men are more likely to commit suicide because of depression.
- Separated or divorced people, especially men, are more likely than married people to become depressed.
- People who have a serious illness are more likely to have depression.

If you have had depression before, there is a good chance that it will happen again.

Taking your medicines even after you feel better can help keep you from getting depressed again. Some people need to take medicine for the rest of their lives.

This information is from the Healthwise® Knowledgebase, which can be accessed at your Member Web site. For more information on depression, log onto your Member Web site at www.mybenefitshome.com and select your service region. Click on “Health Topics” to search the Healthwise® Knowledgebase. If your company is participating in the Lifestyle Returns program, you may be able to get credit toward Lifestyle Returns by using the Healthwise Knowledgebase.

HEALTHMEDIA® PROGRAM OFFERS RELIEF FROM DEPRESSION

Check out the new HealthMedia program called OvercomingSM Depression, which is a clinically sophisticated self-help online program providing 24/7 access to coping strategies and skills for a wide range of symptoms associated with depression. To find it, log onto www.highmarkbcbs.com, click on the *Your Health*, click on *Improve Your Health* choose HealthMedia® OvercomingTM Depression.



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