



“Depression” is a common term these days. We are more or less comfortable using it depending on our circumstance but we all suspect we know what it means to “be depressed”. A “depressed mood” can be a normal response to an event or occurrence in life that is upsetting. It is natural for people to experience this at various points in their lives. Someone may consider “depression” or a “depressed mood” to be a feeling of pervasive “sadness” while someone else talks about it in how they “can’t get out of bed in the morning and don’t feel anything”. Maybe you know of someone who talks about “feeling down” and doesn’t want to participate in life in the way they used to. Maybe that someone is you.

What is important here is to take note of how you are feeling emotionally. Do you find yourself changing your daily routine because of your mood? Perhaps you are isolating yourself? Not eating well or eating too much? Maybe you just want to “be left alone” and this is not typically like you. Notice if something has changed and if it has negatively impacted your life in some way (job, friends, family, health, etc). If so, then begin to talk with someone you trust and get help assessing the problem and how you might be able to help yourself.

Whatever the symptoms may be it is good to reflect on whether or not you are experiencing a depressed mood (that is often short lived and temporary) called a “situational depression” (technically called “adjustment disorder with depressed mood”) or perhaps you or a loved one are experiencing more of a clinical depression (that is often longer term with more significant symptoms) called “major depressive disorder”. There are differences in the two diagnoses that a professional therapist or healthcare provider can help you sort out. Either way, if the symptoms you are experiencing interfere in your ability to participate in and enjoy your life you really should get some help.

Here are some guidelines to help you understand your own situation better.

## Common causes of depression are:

Biological- changes in the body or brain chemistry

Genetics - personal or family history

Psychological - Events in your life such as loss, death, traumatic events.

Stress, Physical Illnesses, Side effects of medications.

Changes in your hormones.

## Symptoms of depression are:

Loss of interest or pleasure in things you used to enjoy

Feeling sad or empty

Crying easily or crying for no reason

Feeling slowed down or feeling unable to sit still

Feeling worthless or guilty

Weight gain or loss, significant changes in your appetite.

Thoughts about death or suicide

Difficulty concentrating or making decisions

Not being able to sleep or wanting to sleep all of the time

Decreased energy or fatigue

Aches, pains, digestive problems with no known physical cause.

## Things you can do to ease your depression:

Psychotherapy or counseling- Find a good therapist or counselor that you can trust. This person can help you establish a safe space in which to explore what is going with you and what you need.

Physician directed medication- Discuss with your doctor options regarding anti-depressant medication. Medication is right for some people and not for others. It will take some personal exploration to see if it makes sense for you.

Food/Nutrition- Talk to a professional healthcare provider about some basic diet changes that can help. Avoiding sugar, alcohol, caffeine and finding ways to properly nourish and hydrate yourself can go a long way to supporting your mood.

Lifestyle changes such as use of exercise and meditation- Find ways to place small changes in your daily routine. Like getting up 15 minutes earlier if you can to have a quiet moment for yourself before your day begins. This will calm your mind and your body and set the tone for the day. Meditate, listen to music, dance a little. Whatever brings you joy.

Stress reduction techniques- start to monitor your stress reactions (flight, fight or freeze responses), how often they happen and what triggers you. Then begin to put into place some safeguards when you get triggered. Example, maybe remove yourself from the space of the stress for a few minutes when you find yourself getting overwhelmed and use your breathing (slow, belly breaths) to calm down. Explore stress reduction techniques to find what works for you or talk to a therapist. Journaling your experience can also shed light on what helps, what doesn't and patterns that you might notice. Journaling can also serve to get the thoughts out of your head and onto the page where you can understand them better.

Social engagement- Find good support in the community- we all need people. Consider who feels supportive and non-judgmental. These are the people in your life that you can call and be yourself with at any time and not worry about it. Then give yourself permission to reach out when you need some help. If you don't have any trusted personal friends look for a professional network to get you started such as a counselor, spiritual director, doctor or support group.

## Keep Going:

If you do not feel better after starting treatment or slip back into depression after doing well you may feel like giving up. Keep going even when you feel frustrated. Keep going to counseling, keep taking your medications, and keep learning about depression. This will help you decrease your depression.

- Keep going to counseling
- Keep taking your prescribed medications
- Keep learning about depression
- Keep going with your diet and lifestyle changes and get people involved to support you.

If you or someone you know is going to commit suicide call 911.

If there is no immediate danger, there are several suicide hotlines you can call to connect to resources and get help.

Call these two hotlines 7 days a week 24 hours a day anywhere in the United States:

1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)

1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)