

Depression

Everyone has moments of sadness or feeling down. Generally, these feelings are a result of distressful circumstances or events in our lives. With time and improved circumstances, these feelings of sadness usually go away. However, there are times when people are overcome by feelings of sadness that do not go away and negatively affect their day-to-day functioning. Depression is a common and serious medical illness that is often misunderstood. Awareness of the signs and symptoms of depression, as well as ways to help those who are depressed, can be an important first step in supporting friends or family members who are suffering from depression.

Some of the most common symptoms of depression are extreme sadness, loss of interest in enjoyed activities, and decreased functioning doing everyday tasks. Since every individual is different, however, depression can affect people in different ways. Numerous factors, such as genetics, personality, and family environment, play a big role in the development of depression and the manifestation of symptoms. Symptoms of depression can also be expressed differently by different age groups. Children with depression may not be able to verbalize their feelings, so they may pretend to be sick. Teens may show more restlessness, frustration, and low self-esteem. Middle-aged adults may notice decreased libido, as well as more physical symptoms, such as gastrointestinal issues. Older adults may experience more loneliness and are also more likely to have other medical conditions or pain that contribute to depression. While all these symptoms vary, the common factor affecting all people with depression is an extreme sense of sadness that does not go away and negatively impacts day-to-day activities.

Included in this article is a list of common signs and symptoms associated with depression. If you notice several of these symptoms in yourself or a loved one, there is help and hope for treatment and healing. Depending on your individual needs and medical situation, you may find relief through counseling, medication, and/or lifestyle changes.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

- *Persistent sadness*
- *Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies or activities*
- *Feelings of hopelessness*
- *Feelings of guilt or worthlessness*
- *Difficulty thinking, concentrating, or making decisions*
- *Changes in appetite or weight*
- *Problems sleeping (inability to sleep or oversleeping)*
- *Decreased energy/fatigue*
- *Aches, pains, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause*
- *Self-harming or substance use*
- *Thoughts of death or suicide*



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Your family doctor can help you to decide which of these options best fits your situation. A professional counselor can help you to find new ways of thinking and coping and help you with relationship or family issues that may be affecting your depression. When seeking treatment, an important thing to remember is to allow time for healing. Do not give up hope or stop treatment

if a specific medication is not working or if your personality does not “click” with your counselor. Since everyone’s situation is unique, it may take some trial and error to find the treatment that works best for you. It is okay to reevaluate, get a second opinion, or try a different counselor. Also, it is important to be proactive and take care of yourself. Included in this article are some practical solutions to help alleviate some of the symptoms of depression.

Practical Self-Care Solutions

- *Try to get some physical activity*
- *Maintain a regular bedtime and wake-up time*
- *Eat regular, healthy meals*
- *Avoid alcohol, nicotine, or drugs*
- *Try to connect with other people and talk with people you trust about how you are feeling*
- *Set daily goals*
- *Break big tasks into smaller tasks*

Watching a loved one struggle with depression can be extremely difficult. At times family members can become frustrated and angry, wondering why their loved one does not just “snap out of it.” However, depression is not a choice, and there are certain genetic and psychological factors that can not be changed or chosen. What is a choice, however, is the decision to get help for depression. What can be changed are the habits and thought patterns that can improve symptoms of depression.

Thus, the best way to help a family member

struggling from depression is to help them to get help. Try to listen supportively, without judging or minimizing. Invite them to go for a walk, go out for lunch, or participate in another activity they used to enjoy. Offer to go with them to a doctor visit or counseling session. ***Above all, bring your loved one to the Lord in prayer, “for of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things.” (Romans 11:36)***