

Let's talk about... Depression

MENTAL ILLNESS DEMYSTIFIED

DEPRESSION CAN AFFECT ANYONE, AT ANY TIME IN LIFE. HERE ARE JUST A FEW SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE WHO DEALT WITH DEPRESSION AT SOME POINT IN THEIR LIFE:

- Vincent Van Gogh
- Winston Churchill
- Buzz Aldrin
- Tennessee Williams
- Boris Yeltsin
- Abraham Lincoln

Most of us feel sad from time to time—it's a normal part of life. But depression is more than a low mood. It can affect your thinking, relationships, studies, ability to carry out your family, work, or school responsibilities, and your health. It interferes with your enjoyment of activities, and it can cause you to become isolated and inactive.

If you ignore depression, these problems work together to make your mood even worse and deplete your energy further. Isolation makes you feel alone and unsupported, low energy and feelings of worthlessness cause you to neglect basic self-care, and avoiding responsibilities worsens feelings of hopelessness and despair. Depression can affect your health at any age.

Medical explanations of depression say that it stems from changes in the brain chemistry that underlie your thinking, feeling, and behaviour.

Psychological explanations of depression say that it stems from unrealistic and negative thinking (about yourself, your future, and your ability to deal with life's challenges) combined with stressful life situations that seem overwhelming and hopeless to change (e.g. chronic pain, an overwhelming course load, competing work and family responsibilities, grief).

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

If you have any of the following symptoms for more than two weeks, talk to your healthcare provider (e.g. family doctor). While none of these symptoms on their own means a diagnosis of depression, all of them should be taken seriously and all can be treated.

- You feel sad, discouraged, hopeless, empty.
- Eating is a big effort and you lose a lot of weight. Or you eat all the time and have significant weight gain.
- You cannot sleep through the night and/or feel like sleeping all the time.
- Daily activities are more difficult to complete (e.g. taking care of yourself or your family).
- You think your life will never get better.
- You have trouble concentrating and making decisions.
- You have thoughts of harming yourself or suicide.

TREATMENT

If your symptoms of depression are few or not severe, you might try managing it on your own. This involves getting emotional support and perhaps seeing a counsellor, eating regular healthy meals, being active, and trying to problem-solve issues that contribute to any stress in your life.

If your symptoms are strong, or you don't feel you can cope on your own, there are several options that can help: antidepressant medication, counselling therapy, or a combination of both. To help you choose the kind of treatment that will be most helpful for you, talk to your healthcare provider.

MAINTAINING TREATMENT GAINS

By carefully monitoring yourself, you can help ensure depression does not return. However, if it does, you can reduce the severity and make your recovery that much faster if you undertake the following:

- Be aware of things that help to stabilize or improve how you are feeling and do these things regularly.
- Follow your healthcare provider's advice. Don't stop any treatment suddenly because this can lead to relapse.
- Slowly work your way back to the roles and responsibilities you had before you became depressed.
- Continue participating with support groups or therapy as long as necessary to help deal with the impact of depression on your life.
- Develop a list of personal warning signs that you can share with trusted friends, and plan what you will do if you encounter stressful challenges or situations that might trigger your depression.
- Avoid alcohol and recreational drugs.
- Stay connected with friends or co-workers, join a group that involves occasional get-togethers and socializing.



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