

FitFacts®



Depression

DEPRESSION IS A COMMON BUT SERIOUS MEDICAL THAT AFFECTS PEOPLE OF EVERY AGE, RACE, ETHNICITY, AND INCOME LEVEL. WITH THE RIGHT TREATMENT AND SELF-CARE, EVEN PEOPLE WITH THE MOST SEVERE DEPRESSION CAN FEEL NORMAL AGAIN.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Major depression is different than “the blues,” and it certainly is not a sign of weakness. The exact cause is unknown, but it is most likely caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Common symptoms of depression include: .

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- Intense feelings of sadness
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Feelings of guilt or hopelessness
- Loss of energy
- Poor concentration
- Increased or decreased appetite
- Moving more quickly or slowly than normal
- Loss of self-esteem
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep or sleeping too much
- Thoughts of death or wanting to hurt yourself

If you think that you are experiencing depression, it is important that you visit your health care provider as soon as possible. In order to make a diagnosis, he/she may:

- Ask more questions
- Do a physical exam
- Order blood tests
- Refer you to a mental health specialist

HOW DEPRESSION IS TREATED?

If you are diagnosed with depression, one or more of the following modes of treatment may be recommended:

- **Medication**—Several types of antidepressant medications are available. Only your health care provider can determine which medications, if any, are right for you. It is important to take these as directed, report any side effects, and do not take medication prescribed for another person.
- **Psychotherapy (counseling)**—Research has shown that psychotherapy is a key component in the treatment of depression and often works better when combined with medication therapy.

- **Exercise**—Did you know that several studies have shown that exercise is often more effective than medication in treating depression? This is helpful for depression because it stimulates the release of brain chemicals that improve your mood. While your doctor may also prescribe medications, committing to an activity program will kick start your recovery.
- **Other forms of treatment** such as electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), transcranial nerve stimulation (TNS), complementary and alternative treatments may be helpful for certain cases. This would be determined by your mental health specialist.

SELF-CARE WHEN YOU ARE DEPRESSED

An important part of overcoming depression is to take good care of yourself mentally AND physically:

- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Break large tasks up into smaller ones.
- Try to spend time with others. Avoid isolation.
- Talk about your feelings with a loved one.
- Eat a healthy diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, lean meats, whole grains, and water. Avoid [junk food](#) in excess.
- Begin and maintain a regular exercise program.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Council on Exercise](#)

[National Institutes of Mental Health](#)