

# TEEN..... DEPRESSION

Being a teenager can be tough. There are changes taking place in your body and brain that can affect how you learn, think, and behave. And if you are facing tough or stressful situations, it is normal to have emotional ups and downs.

But if you have been overwhelmingly sad for a long time (a few weeks to months) and you're not able to concentrate or do the things you usually enjoy, you may want to talk to a trusted adult about depression.



National Institute  
of Mental Health

## What Is Depression?

Depression (major depressive disorder) is a medical illness that can interfere with your ability to handle your daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or managing your school work. Depression is common but that doesn't mean it isn't serious. Treatment may be needed for someone to feel better. Depression can happen at any age, but often symptoms begin in the teens or early 20s or 30s. It can occur along with other mental disorders, substance abuse, and other health conditions.

## Why can't you just 'snap out' of depression?

Well-meaning friends or family members may try to tell someone with depression to "snap out of it," "just be positive," or "you can be happier if you just try harder." But depression is not a sign of weakness or a character flaw. **Most people with depression need treatment to get better.**

## What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Depression?

Sadness is something we all experience. It is a normal reaction to a loss or a setback, but it usually passes with a little time. Depression is different.

If you are wondering if you may have depression, ask yourself these questions:

- ▶ Do you constantly feel sad, anxious, or even "empty," like you feel nothing?
- ▶ Do you feel hopeless or like everything is going wrong?

- ▶ Do you feel like you're worthless or helpless? Do you feel guilty about things?
- ▶ Do you feel irritable much of the time?
- ▶ Do you find yourself spending more time alone and withdrawing from friends and family?
- ▶ Are your grades dropping?
- ▶ Have you lost interest or pleasure in activities and hobbies that you used to enjoy?
- ▶ Have your eating or sleeping habits changed (eating or sleeping more than usual or less than usual)?
- ▶ Do you always feel tired? Like you have less energy than normal or no energy at all?
- ▶ Do you feel restless or have trouble sitting still?
- ▶ Do you feel like you have trouble concentrating, remembering information, or making decisions?
- ▶ Do you have aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or stomach problems without a clear cause?
- ▶ Do you ever think about dying or suicide? Have you ever tried to harm yourself?

## What Should I Do If I am Considering Suicide or Harming Myself?

If you are in crisis and need help, call this toll-free number for the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL)**, available 24 hours a day, every day: 1-800-273-TALK (8255). The service is available to everyone. The deaf and hard of hearing can contact the Lifeline via TTY at 1-800-799-4889. All calls are confidential. You can also visit the Lifeline's website at [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

The **Crisis Text Line** is another free, confidential resource available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Text "HOME" to 741741 and a trained crisis counselor will respond to you with support and information over text message. Visit [www.crisistextline.org](http://www.crisistextline.org).

Not everyone with depression experiences every symptom. Some people experience only a few symptoms. Others may have many. The symptoms and how long they last will vary from person to person.

## How Do I Get Help?

If you think you might have depression, you are not alone. Depression is common, but it is also treatable. Ask for help! Here are a few steps you can take:

- ▶ **Step 1:** Try talking to a trusted adult, such as your parent or guardian, your teacher, or a school counselor. If you don't feel comfortable speaking to an adult, try talking to a friend. If you are not sure where to turn, you can use TXT 4 HELP Interactive ([www.nationalsafeplace.org/txt-4-help](http://www.nationalsafeplace.org/txt-4-help)), which allows you to text live with a mental health professional.

For more ideas and a list of health hotlines, visit [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov) (search words: children and adolescents).

- **Step 2:** If you're under the age of 18, ask your parent or guardian to make an appointment with your doctor for an evaluation. Your doctor can make sure you don't have a physical illness that may be affecting your mental health. Your doctor may also talk to you about the possibility of seeing a mental health professional, such as a psychiatrist, counselor, psychologist, or therapist. These practitioners can diagnose and treat depression and other mental disorders.

## How is Depression Treated?

Depression is usually treated with psychotherapy, medication, or a combination of the two.

## What is psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy (sometimes called “talk therapy”) is a term for treatment techniques that can help you identify and manage troubling emotions, thoughts, and behavior. Psychotherapy can take place in a one-on-one meeting with you and a licensed mental health professional. Sometimes you might be part of a group guided by a mental health professional.

Read more about psychotherapy at [www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/psychotherapies](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/psychotherapies).

## What medications treat depression? .....

If your doctor thinks you need medicine to treat your depression, he or she might prescribe an antidepressant.

When you are taking an antidepressant, it is important to carefully follow your doctor's directions for taking your medicine. The medication could take up to six weeks to work and you should not stop taking it without the help of a doctor. You should also avoid using alcohol or drugs that have not been prescribed to you so that your medications can work.

When it is time to stop the medication, the doctor will help you slowly and safely decrease the dose so that your body can adjust. If you stop taking the medication too soon, your depression symptoms may return. Another reason to stop medication gradually is that stopping suddenly can cause withdrawal symptoms like anxiety and irritability.

Antidepressants can have side effects. These side effects are usually mild (possible stomach upsets or headaches) and may go away on their own. But talk to your doctor about any side effects that you experience because your doctor might adjust the dose or change the medicine. For more information about side effects, visit [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov).

Although antidepressants can be effective, they may present serious risks to some, especially children and teens. Anyone taking antidepressants should be monitored closely, especially when they first start taking them. Severe anxiety or agitation early in treatment can be especially distressing and should be reported to the doctor immediately.

For many people, the risks of untreated depression outweigh the side effects of antidepressant medications when they are used under a doctor's careful supervision. Information about medications changes frequently. Talk to your doctor and visit the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website ([www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)) for the latest safety information.

## What else can I do to help manage my depression? .....

Be patient and know that treatment takes time to work. In the meantime, you can:

- ▶ Stay active and exercise, even if it's just going for a walk.
- ▶ Try to keep a regular sleep schedule.
- ▶ Spend time with friends and family.
- ▶ Break down school or work tasks into smaller ones and organize them in order of what needs to get done first. Then, do what you can.

## What Can I Do If Someone I Know Might Have Depression? .....

If you think your friend might have depression, first help him or her talk to a trusted adult who can connect your friend to a health professional. You can also:

- ▶ Be supportive, patient, and encouraging, even if you don't fully understand what's going on.
- ▶ Invite your friend to activities, social events, or just to hang out.

- ▶ Remind your friend that getting help is important and that with time and treatment, he or she will feel better.
- ▶ **Never ignore comments about death and suicide**, even if it seems like a joke or overdramatic. Talking about suicide is not just a bid for attention but should be taken seriously. Talk to a trusted adult such as a parent, teacher or older sibling as soon as you can.

## What Should I Do If Someone I Know Is Considering Suicide?

Often, family and friends are the first to recognize the warning signs of suicide and can take the first step toward helping the person find help.

### **Remember:**

- ▶ If someone is telling you that he or she is going to kill himself or herself, do not leave him or her alone.
- ▶ Do not promise anyone that you will keep his or her suicidal thoughts a secret. Make sure to tell a trusted friend or family member, or an adult with whom you feel comfortable.
- ▶ Get help as soon as possible. Call 911 for emergency services and/or take the person to the nearest hospital emergency room.

You can also call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), the toll-free number for the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL)**, which is available 24 hours a day, every day. The service is available to everyone. All calls are free and confidential. You can also chat with the NSPL online (<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>).



The Crisis Text Line is another free, confidential resource available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Text “HOME” to 741741 and a trained crisis counselor will respond to you with support and information via text message. Visit <https://www.crisistextline.org>.

## **What if someone is posting suicidal messages or something disturbing on social media? .....**

**If you see messages or live streaming suicidal behavior on social media, call 911 immediately**, contact the toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or text the Crisis Text Line (text HOME to 741741).

Some social media sites also have a process to report suicidal content and get help for the person posting the message. Each offers different options on how to respond if you see concerning posts about suicide. For example:

- ▶ Facebook Suicide Prevention webpage can be found at [www.facebook.com/help/](https://www.facebook.com/help/) [use the search term “suicide” or “suicide prevention”].
- ▶ Instagram uses automated tools in the app to provide resources, which can also be found online at <https://help.instagram.com> [use the search term, “suicide,” “self-injury,” or “suicide prevention”].
- ▶ Snapchat’s Support provides guidance at <https://support.snapchat.com> [use the search term, “suicide” or “suicide prevention”].

- ▶ Tumblr Counseling and Prevention Resources webpage can be found at <https://tumblr.zendesk.com> [use the search term “counseling” or “prevention,” then click on “Counseling and prevention resources”].
- ▶ Twitter’s Best Practices in Dealing With Self-Harm and Suicide at <https://support.twitter.com> [use the search term “suicide,” “self-harm,” or “suicide prevention”].
- ▶ YouTube’s Safety Center webpage can be found at <https://support.google.com/youtube> [use the search term “suicide and self-injury”].

Because help via these processes may be delayed, it is still important to call 911 if someone is posting suicidal messages or something disturbing on social media. People—even strangers—have saved lives by being vigilant.

## For More Information

For more information on depression and suicide prevention, visit the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) website ([www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)).

## Related Resources:

- ▶ Medline Plus (National Library of Medicine): <https://medlineplus.gov/teenhealth.html> (En español: <https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/teenhealth.html>)
- ▶ NIDA for Teens, Drugs & Health: <http://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog>
- ▶ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>, 1-800-273-TALK (8255), free 24-hour help
- ▶ Anti-Bullying: <https://www.stopbullying.gov>

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