

Layton Aging & Alzheimer's Disease Center

Depression

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What is Depression?

Depression is not the same as feeling “sad”, “down in the dumps” or “blue”. Depression is an illness that may last weeks, months or years; and affects the body, mood and thoughts. Depression affects the way someone eats and sleeps, the way one feels about oneself; and the way a person thinks about things. It is not a condition that someone can avoid with a strong will or the desire to improve. Without treatment, depression symptoms can continue to affect a person for weeks, months or years. In a one-year period 9.5% of the population, or about 18.8 million American adults suffer from depression. Depression affects more than 6.5 million of the 35 million Americans who are 65 years or older. Depressive illness often interferes with how the affected person manages day to day. It can result in pain and suffering for the persons with the illness, as well as the people who care about them. It is important to know there are effective treatments that can help most people who suffer from depression.

Major depression causes a combination of symptoms that interfere with the ability to work, sleep, eat and enjoy once pleasurable activities. An individual may experience one or more such disabling episodes in a lifetime. Symptoms of depression may include:

- Restlessness, irritability
- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest in previously pleasurable activities
- Loss of energy, feeling fatigued, slowed-down, or tired
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Loss of appetite or weight loss, or, overeating and weight gain
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain

How is Depression Diagnosed?

It is important to have a physical examination by a medical provider. There are medications or medical conditions that can mimic the symptoms of depression. Other causes are ruled out after a medical history, exam and laboratory tests. If there is not a physical cause for the depression, a psychological evaluation should be done by the physician, nurse practitioner, or by referral to a psychiatrist, psychologist.

What treatment is available?

Depending on the result of the evaluation, a variety of medications, treatments or psychotherapy may be chosen.

What resources are available?

- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) 1-301-443-4513 website: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>
- National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) 1-800-950-NAMI or website: <http://www.nami.org>
- National Foundation for Depressive Illness, Inc. 1-800-239-1265 or website: <http://www.depression.org>
- National Mental Health Association (NMHA) 1-800-969-6942 or website <http://.nmha.org>

Reference: Adapted from Depression, NIMH Publication No. 02-3561, reprinted September 2002.