Depression

**What is depression?**

Depression is a mental health condition that causes you to feel sad, lose interest in activities that you used to enjoy, withdraw from others, and have little energy. It's different from normal feelings of sadness, grief, or low energy. Depression can also cause people to feel hopeless about the future and to even think about suicide.

It is not a character flaw, and it does not mean that you are a bad or weak person.

Depression is very common. It affects people of all ages.

If you think you may be depressed, tell your doctor. Treatment can help you enjoy life again.

**What causes it?**

When you have depression, there may be problems with activity levels in certain parts of your brain. Or chemicals in your brain called neurotransmitters may be out of balance. Most experts believe that a combination of family history (your genes) and stressful life events may cause depression.

**What are the symptoms?**

One of the most common symptoms of depression is feeling sad, hopeless, or tearful. The other is losing interest in daily activities you used to enjoy. If you have had these symptoms nearly every day for at least 2 weeks, you might have depression.

**How is it diagnosed?**

If your doctor thinks you are depressed, he or she will ask you questions about your health and feelings. Your doctor also may do a physical exam and tests to make sure your depression isn't caused by another disease.

**How is depression treated?**

Doctors usually treat depression with counselling or medicines. Often a combination of the two works best. Many people don't get help because they think that they'll get over the depression on their own. But some people do not get better without treatment.

In many cases, counselling can work as well as medicines to treat mild to moderate depression. Counselling is done by licensed mental health providers, such as psychologists and social workers. This kind of treatment deals with how you think about things and how you act each day.

Antidepressant medicines can improve the symptoms of depression in 1 to 3 weeks. But it can take 6 to 8 weeks to see more improvement. Your doctor will likely have you keep taking these medicines for at least 6 months.

If depression is caused by a medical problem, treating that problem may also help relieve the depression.

Counselling is an important part of treatment for depression. You will work with a mental health professional such as a psychologist, clinical social worker, or psychiatrist. Together you will develop an action plan to treat depression.

When you hear "counselling" or "therapy," you may think of lying on a couch and talking about your childhood. But these treatments focus on how you think about things and how you act each day.

Therapies that are helpful for people with depression include:

[**Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT)**](https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=stc17236&lang=en-ca#stc17236-sec)**.**

CBT teaches you how to change the ways you think and behave. This can help you stop thinking bad thoughts about yourself and your life. You can take part in CBT with a therapist or in a group setting.

[**Interpersonal therapy**](https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=ty1501&lang=en-ca#ty1501-sec)**.**

This therapy looks at your social and personal relationships and related problems.

**Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).**

In ACT, you work with a therapist to learn to accept your negative feelings but not let them run your life. You learn to make choices and to act based on your personal values, not negative feelings.

**Mindfulness-based therapies.**

Examples include mindfulness-based stress reduction and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy. These treatments help you to focus your attention on what is happening at the moment without trying to change it. They teach you to let go of past regrets and not worry about the future. For people who have had more than one episode of depression, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy may help reduce the risk of relapse.