

Feeling Depressed

Life is full of changes. Everyday events and our reactions to them sometimes interfere with our sense of well-being and peace of mind. It is common to get the blues or become sad when disappointed. Symptoms of depression are the most common medical problems seen by health professionals. It is estimated that feelings of depression will affect about one-third of all adults in the United States at some time in their lives.

Most people experience feelings of sadness over such losses as divorce or separation, the death of a friend or loved one, or a job change or layoff. These feelings are an expected reaction to a "triggering event," and most people get over them in time.

Several factors increase your risk of developing feelings of depression, such as:

- Being female. Women are twice as likely as men to experience feelings of depression. Hormonal changes may play a role in these feelings, which may be more evident during pregnancy, especially shortly after the birth of a baby (postpartum depression) or shortly before or during menopause. Some women experience feelings of sadness or depression shortly before the start of menstruation (premenstrual syndrome, or PMS).
- Age older than 60. Feelings of depression in this age group are frequently overlooked because the symptoms are similar to other diseases and problems experienced by older adults. Adults in this age group are more likely to experience social isolation. Feelings of sadness may accompany other life events, such as retirement, death of a spouse or child, or declining physical abilities.
- Personal or family history. You are more likely to experience feelings of depression if you have a history of previous depression, an anxiety disorder, or another mental illness. You are also 2 to 3 times more likely to experience feelings of depression if one or both of your parents were diagnosed with depression.
- Medical problems—such as cancer, kidney disease, heart disease, or Parkinson's disease—or alcohol or substance abuse or withdrawal.
- Stressful life events, such as changing jobs, the loss of a job, or children leaving home.
- Lack of family or social support.

Symptoms of depression that may point to a need for treatment vary from person to person. If you experience feelings of sadness or loss of interest in pleasurable activities plus 4 or more of the following symptoms for 2 weeks or longer, you may be depressed.

- Changes in appetite or weight
- Restlessness or decreased activity that is noticed by others

- Feeling tired or sleepy all of the time
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping more than usual
- Inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Preoccupation with death or recurrent thoughts of suicide

People who feel depressed may also have physical symptoms, such as body aches or stomach problems.

Because "mood swings" and other emotional changes are considered a normal part of growing up, depression in children and teens often goes unrecognized. Children and teens do develop depression, and it can affect a child's quality of life. If prolonged or severe depression is left untreated, it can lead to serious outcomes, including suicide attempts and even completed suicide. If you are thinking about suicide, talk to someone about your feelings, such as your health professional or a close friend or family member you trust. Don't wait. If you are not able to talk with your health professional immediately, call your local suicide hotline or this suicide hotline (Canada and U.S.): **1-800-SUICIDE** or **1-800-273-TALK** or **1-800-273-8255**.

Current as of: September 23, 2018

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Practicing Gratitude

What does it mean to be grateful?

Gratitude is saying "thank you." But it's more than a thank-you to a friend for a favor or gift. Gratitude is saying thanks for everything that is important to you and good in your life. You are thankful for a gift, but you're also thankful to watch a sunset, do well at a sport, or to be alive. You see your life and your experiences as a gift.

Gratitude is linked to well-being. One group of three studies suggests that people who practice gratitude appear to be more optimistic, pleased with their lives, and connected to others when compared to those who reflect on daily hassles or on everyday events. Another study suggests that gratitude in teens is linked to feeling good about life, being optimistic, and having a good social network.

You also might find that gratitude may help decrease anger. If you find yourself thinking about how someone has wronged you, shift your attention to someone else who has been there to support you.

Gratitude may also be linked to resilience, which is having an "inner strength" that helps you bounce back after stressful situations. The traits mentioned above, such as optimism and connection with others, are often found in people who are resilient.

How can you practice gratitude?

To practice gratitude, you say "thanks" and you appreciate what's important to you.

- Spend a few minutes at the end of each day and think about, or even write down, what you are grateful for that day. Think about people, events, or experiences that have had a positive impact on you.
- Call or email someone just to say "thanks."
- Write thank-you notes as well as saying "thank you" when you receive gifts or favors. Or write a letter of gratitude and appreciation to someone. You don't have to mail it.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about something a stranger did for you. Or just say "thank you" to people you don't know, such as waving when a person lets your car cut in during heavy traffic.
- When feeling burdened by your health, give thanks for the abilities you still have.
- Start a family ritual of gratitude, such as giving thanks before a meal.
- Find a creative way to give thanks. For example, plant a garden of gratitude or take pictures of things you are grateful for.

Current as of: June 28, 2018

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Sleeping Better

Sleep is important for your physical and emotional health. Sleep can help you stay healthy by keeping your immune system strong. Getting enough sleep can help your mood and make you feel less stressed.

But we all have trouble sleeping sometimes. This can be for many reasons. You may have trouble sleeping because of depression, insomnia, or fatigue. If you feel anxious or have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), you may also have trouble falling or staying asleep.

Whatever the cause, there are things you can do.

Your sleeping area

Your sleeping area and what you do during the day can affect how well you sleep. Too much noise, light, or activity in your bedroom can make sleeping harder. Creating a quiet, comfortable sleeping area can help. Here are some things you can do to sleep better.

- Use your bedroom only for sleeping and sex.
- Move the TV and radio out of your bedroom.
- Try not to use your computer, smartphone, or tablet to compute, text, or use the Internet while you are in bed.
- Keep your bedroom quiet, dark, and cool. Use curtains or blinds to block out light. Consider using soothing music or a "white noise" machine to block out noise.

Your evening and bedtime routine

Having an evening routine and a set bedtime will help your body get used to a sleeping schedule. You may want to ask others in your household to help you with your routine.

- Try to not use technology devices such as smartphones, computers, or tablets during the hours before bedtime. The light from these devices and the emotions that can result from checking email or social media sites can make it harder to unwind and fall asleep.
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine. You might want to take a warm shower or bath, listen to soothing music, or drink a cup of non-caffeinated tea.
- Go to bed at the same time every night. And get up at the same time every morning, even if you feel tired.
- Use a sleep mask and earplugs, if light and noise bother you.

If you can't sleep

- Imagine yourself in a peaceful, pleasant scene. Focus on the details and feelings of being in a place that is relaxing.
- Get up and do a quiet or boring activity until you feel sleepy.
- Don't drink any liquids after 6 p.m. if you wake up often because you have to go to the bathroom.

Your activities during the day

Your habits and activities can affect how well you sleep. Here are some tips.

- Get regular exercise. Figure out what time of day works best for your sleep patterns.
- Get outside during daylight hours. Spending time in sunlight helps to reset your body's sleep and wake cycles.
- Limit caffeine (coffee, tea, caffeinated sodas) during the day. And don't have any for at least 4 to 6 hours before bedtime.
- Don't drink alcohol before bedtime. Alcohol can cause you to wake up more often during the night.
- Don't smoke or use tobacco, especially in the evening. Nicotine can keep you awake.
- Don't take naps during the day, especially close to bedtime.
- Don't take medicine that may keep you awake, or make you feel hyper or energized, right before bed. Your doctor can tell you if your medicine may do this and if you can take it earlier in the day.

If you can't sleep because you are in great pain or have an injury, or you often feel anxious at night, or you often have bad dreams or nightmares, talk with your doctor.

Current as of: September 11, 2018

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Social Connections

What are social connections?

Social connections are the relationships you have with the people around you. They may be close, like family, friends, and coworkers, or more distant, like people you know casually. They can be as close as next door or so far away that you only connect with them by telephone or through the Internet.

Your network of relationships may be big or small. One or two close family members or friends may be all you need to feel supported and valued. Whether your circle is big or small, the important thing is that you are there for each other.

Why are social connections important?

Resilience, the ability to bounce back after stressful situations, is strengthened when you give and receive support. Building positive relationships with people can make a difference in how resilient you are. Try to connect with people who have a positive outlook and can make you laugh and help you. The more positive your relationships are, the better you'll be able to face life's challenges.

The support you get from your social connections can add to your feelings of meaning and purpose in life. These, in turn, add to your resilience. Happy, resilient people tend to be more connected to the people around them. Resilient people know that they can depend on the strength of their family and friends when the going gets tough.

Remember that giving support is just as important as getting support. You count on your social connections for support, but they also count on you. Ask others about their families, jobs, and interests, and help them when you can. Don't always focus on your challenges or talk about yourself. Know when it's time to listen or just enjoy your friends' company. Giving support to others builds the social bonds that help make you resilient.

How can you make more social connections?

There are many ways you can start building positive relationships:

- Invite a friend who makes you laugh, and go to a funny movie.
- Send an encouraging email or text message to someone who's going through a hard time.
- Look for a faith community that shares your views. It may also have its own organized social groups.
- Call a food bank or hospital and ask about their volunteer programs.

You can also connect with people through social media on the Internet. Many people interact more freely with people they can't see face-to-face. Online forums about specific interests can be a good choice for people who cannot leave their homes or are shy or self-conscious.

Current as of: June 28, 2018

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