

Is It Depression or Just the Blues?

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Sooner or later, everyone gets the blues. Feeling sadness, loneliness, or grief when you go through a difficult life experience is part of being human. And most of the time, you can continue to function. You know that in time you will bounce back, and you do.

But what if you don't bounce back? What if your feelings of sadness linger, are excessive, or interfere with your work, sleep, or recreation? What if you're feeling fatigue or worthlessness, or experiencing weight changes along with your sadness? You may be experiencing major depression.

Also known as clinical depression, major depressive disorder, or unipolar depression, major depression is a medical condition that exists beyond life's ordinary ups and downs. Almost 18.8 million American adults experience depression each year, and women are nearly twice as likely as men to develop major depression. People with depression cannot simply "pull themselves together" and get better. Treatment -- consisting of counseling or medications, or both -- can be key to recovery.

Major Depression: What Are the Symptoms?

Depression shows itself differently in different people. *Common depression symptoms are:*

- Depressed mood, sadness, or an "empty" feeling, or appearing sad or tearful to others
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities you once enjoyed
- Significant weight loss when not dieting, or significant weight gain (for example, more than 5% of body weight in a month)
- Inability to sleep or excessive sleeping
- Restlessness or irritation (irritable mood may be a symptom in children or adolescents too), or feelings of "dragging"
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness, or excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating, or indecisiveness
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or specific plan for committing suicide

Depression Treatment: When Should You Get Help?

If you have five or more of these symptoms for most of the day, nearly every day, for at least two weeks, and the symptoms are severe enough to interfere with your daily activities, you may have major depression. It's important to speak to your doctor about treatments to start helping you feel better.