

# Depression — more than just “the blues”



Depression is one of the most common mental illnesses in the world. Health surveys have found that many people experience depression at some point in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

Depression can affect every aspect of your life — emotions, physical health and relationships — and can bring down your quality of life. It can also affect your job performance. You may be absent from work more often and when you are present, your productivity may be decreased. In fact, depressed people are more likely to become unemployed than people who aren't depressed.

Depression is serious and different from normal stress or anxiety. See how depression fits on a continuum of feelings in the table below.

## A continuum of feelings<sup>2</sup>

	What you feel	Description
<b>Positive</b>	<b>Excitement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenged</li> <li>Motivated</li> <li>Inspired</li> <li>Productive</li> <li>Creative</li> </ul>	Excitement is a mostly positive feeling. It is how you respond to a challenge. When you are confronted with a situation for which you are well prepared, you get excited as you think about a good experience. Your feelings of excitement may even alternate with feelings of nervousness.
<b>Negative</b>	<b>Stress</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hassled</li> <li>Hurried</li> <li>Doubtful</li> <li>Driven</li> <li>Pressured</li> </ul>	Stress is the feeling of being overwhelmed. When faced with a challenge, you may have the confidence to handle the situation if only you had more time to prepare yourself. You may begin to feel pressured to work harder, do better and be perfect. You feel tense and irritable as your head hurts and your stomach ties up in knots.
<b>Negative</b>	<b>Anxiety</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worried</li> <li>Helpless</li> <li>Strained</li> <li>Withdrawn</li> </ul>	Anxiety is the point where you perceive something negative or bad might happen and you don't believe you can do anything about it. You begin to worry about it over and over until you can't get the situation out of your mind.

	What you feel	Description
<b>Negative</b>	<b>Depression</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Threatened</li> <li>Hopeless</li> <li>Physically ill</li> <li>Suicidal</li> </ul>	Major depression is when you constantly perceive life as threatening and dangerous, even when no threats exist. You begin to lose all hope about controlling these threats. You may become lethargic and feel you will never be able to change anything. You give up trying to cope and feel worthless.

## Diagnosing depression<sup>2</sup>

If you think you could be experiencing depression, it is important that you see a doctor or health care provider for a proper diagnosis. In addition to reviewing your medical history, your doctor will ask about your symptoms. You are likely suffering from depression if:

- You have had at least five of the symptoms in the chart below nearly every day during the same two-week period (including at least one of the two marked in bold)

**and**

- These symptoms represent a change from your usual behavior

### Self-assessment: Are you experiencing symptoms of depression<sup>2</sup>

Mark any of the symptoms that you have had nearly every day during the same two-week period. Give the specific frequency and timeframe for each symptom that you mark.

	Symptoms of depression	Frequency/Timeframe of symptoms
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Depressed mood most of the day</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Noticeably lower interest or pleasure in almost all activities most of the day</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Significant weight loss (when not attempting weight loss) or significant weight gain — a change of more than five percent of your body weight in a month — or a decrease or increase in appetite	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Inability to sit still or tendency to move very slowly (which is observable by others)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fatigue or loss of energy	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recurring thoughts about death or suicide	

## Suicide

At its worse, depression leads to suicide. Close to 800,000 people die due to suicide every year worldwide. For every suicide there are many more people who attempt suicide every year.<sup>3</sup> A prior suicide attempt is the single most important risk factor for suicide in the general population.

Suicide is a serious and preventable public health problem that can have lasting harmful effects on individuals, families and communities. While the causes of suicide vary, suicide prevention strategies have two major goals: to reduce factors that increase risk and to increase factors that promote resilience and coping.

Efforts to prevent suicide require coordination and collaboration among multiple sectors of society, including health care, education, business and labor, law enforcement and justice, the media and others. These measures can help:<sup>4</sup>

- Early identification, treatment and care of people with mental and substance use disorders, chronic pain and acute emotional stress
- Reduced access to the means of suicide among people at risk (for example, pesticides, firearms, certain medications)
- School-based interventions, including parenting skills and family relationship programs
- Alcohol policies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol (abuse of alcohol is a major risk factor for suicide)
- Safe reporting and messaging about suicide
- Follow-up care and community support for people who attempted suicide



### What can you do?

At the earliest signs of stress, take steps to prevent negative feelings. If you begin to experience feelings of anxiety or depression, seek professional help immediately.

Sources:

1. World Health Organization. Fact Sheets: Depression, 2020.
2. INTERVENT International. Lifestyle Management Program, Understanding Depression, 2020.
3. World Health Organization. Fact Sheets: Suicide, 2019.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Suicide: Prevention Strategies. Available from: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov); accessed on 5-1-2020.

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