



University of Michigan  
Depression Center

## DEPRESSION



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**University of Michigan Depression Center**  
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**For more information about depression, including  
treatments and research, please visit our websites:**

[www.depressioncenter.org](http://www.depressioncenter.org)

[www.depressiontoolkit.org](http://www.depressiontoolkit.org)

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THE MICHIGAN DIFFERENCE®

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a common but serious illness. It is more than feeling sad or blue for a few days. It can interfere with daily life and affect work, school, and relationships.

## DEPRESSION CAN AFFECT ANYONE

Depression does not discriminate. It affects men, women, and children of all ages and all cultural and economic backgrounds. It often occurs along with other illnesses, such as anxiety, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.

## WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION?

Scientists agree that depression is an illness of the brain, but its exact causes are not always clear. In fact, several factors, alone or in combination, can bring about the specific changes in brain chemistry that can lead to the many symptoms of depression. These factors can include genetics, changes in hormone levels, stress, grief, or dealing with substance use disorders or other medical conditions.



## SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Depression is an illness that can take many forms. Symptoms can vary from person to person in how severe they are, how long they last, and how often they appear. Symptoms may include:

- Feeling sad or empty
- Feeling tired or less energetic
- Feeling irritable or restless
- Feelings of hopelessness or guilt
- Difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions
- Withdrawing from people and feeling alone
- Less interest in friends, family, hobbies, or other activities that normally bring pleasure.
- Regular, unexplained aches and pains
- Changes in weight (loss or gain)
- Overeating, OR loss of appetite
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Thoughts of suicide, or suicide attempts

Everyone goes through periods of sadness and experiences at least some of these symptoms from time to time, but it does not always mean that a person has clinical depression. When making a diagnosis of depression, healthcare providers look for clusters of symptoms lasting more than two weeks that affect a person's daily life.

## TREATING DEPRESSION

Safe and effective treatments for depression are available. Many people can improve with treatment, even those with severe depression. Treatment is most effective if depression is detected early and treatment is begun early. If untreated, episodes of depression are more likely to return, and more likely to get worse over time.

The most common treatments are medication and talk therapy (psychotherapy). For many people, the best treatment is a combination of these. Other treatments may involve stimulating targeted areas of the brain with electricity or magnetic fields.

Improving nutrition, sleep, and physical exercise and not misusing alcohol or other drugs can also help reduce the symptoms of depression. The support of family and friends can also be very important for recovery.

It may take several tries to come up with the treatment plan that works best for each individual. Even treatments that seem to be working should be monitored and adjusted if needed.