

# Understanding Depression

Depression is a common condition that affects 1 in 10 Americans each year.<sup>1</sup> It can affect a person of any age, race or social standing.

People misunderstand depression to be sadness, or a down mood that you can just snap out of. This isn't the case. Job loss, divorce or the death of a loved one can cause grief and sadness that lifts over time. Depression is a medical condition with both physical and emotional symptoms that can occur even when things are going well. If it isn't treated, it can last for months or even years.

## Am I suffering from depression?

The symptoms of depression are different for everybody. Talk to your doctor if you're experiencing any of these signs for long periods:<sup>2</sup>

- A sad, anxious or empty mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- Loss of interest in activities you used to like, including sex
- Fatigue, low energy or being slowed down
- Trouble remembering or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, like insomnia, waking up too early or oversleeping
- Overeating and weight gain
- Loss of appetite and weight loss
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Restlessness or irritability
- Physical problems that don't respond to treatment, like headaches, stomach aches and chronic pain

## How can I help someone I know?

A depressed person often feels overwhelmed, hopeless and apathetic. These feelings can make it difficult for them to get help. Tell your loved one to speak with a doctor about what they are feeling.

A depressed person needs your support. Be kind but firm, and offer understanding, patience and encouragement. Listen carefully when you talk with your loved one, and try to get them to spend time with other people. Don't push too hard, but suggest activities they used to like.

If they express negative feelings, point out what's positive and offer hope. If they speak of suicide, report this to their therapist or doctor.

## What if I'm suffering from depression?

If you think you are depressed, ask for help. Call your doctor, or talk with a trusted friend or family member so they can get you the help you deserve.

Most people don't just "snap out" of a depression. It's important to get professional help and follow your doctor's advice.



<sup>1</sup> National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, *Health-Related Quality of Life; Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System* (2008): [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Mental Health, *Depression* (September 23, 2009): [nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov)

<sup>3</sup> WebMD, *Depression Guide* (May 4, 2008): [webmd.com](http://webmd.com)

<sup>4</sup> Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, *Depression Across the Lifespan* (August 25, 2006): [dbsalliance.org](http://dbsalliance.org)

This information is intended for educational purposes only, and should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please consult your physician for advice about changes that may affect your health.