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Depression Overview

Throughout the course of our lives, we all experience episodes of unhappiness, sadness, or grief. Often, when a loved one dies or we suffer a personal tragedy or difficulty such as divorce or loss of a job, we may feel depressed (some people call this "the blues"). Most of us are able to cope with these and other types of stressful events.

Over a period of days or weeks, the majority of us are able to return to our normal

activities. But when these feelings of sadness and other symptoms make it hard for us to get through the day, and when the symptoms last for more than a couple of weeks, we may have what is called clinical depression. The term "clinical depression" is usually used to distinguish "true" depression from the blues.

Clinical depression is not just grief or sadness. It is an illness that can challenge your ability to perform even routine daily activities. At its worst, depression may lead you to contemplate or commit [suicide](#). Depression represents a burden for both you and your family. Sometimes that burden can seem overwhelming.

There are several different types of depression (mood disorders that include depressive symptoms):

- **Major depression** is a change in mood that lasts for weeks or months. It is one of the most severe types of depression. It usually involves a low or irritable mood and/or a loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities. It interferes with one's normal functioning and often include physical symptoms. A person may experience only one episode, but often there are repeated episodes over an individual's lifetime.
- **Dysthymia** is less severe than major depression but usually goes on for a longer period, often several years. There are usually periods of feeling fairly normal between episodes of low mood. The symptoms usually do not completely disrupt one's normal activities.
- **Bipolar disorder** involves episodes of depression, usually severe, alternating with episodes of extreme elation called mania. This condition is sometimes called by its older name, manic depression. The depression that is associated with bipolar disorder is often referred to as bipolar depression.
- **Seasonal depression**, which medical professionals call [seasonal affective disorder](#), or SAD, is depression that occurs only at a certain time of the year, usually winter. It is sometimes called "winter blues." Although it is predictable, it can be very severe.

Adjustment disorder is distress that occurs in relation to a stressful life event. It is usually an isolated reaction that resolves when the [stress](#) passes. Although it may be accompanied by a depressed mood, it is not considered a depressive disorder.

Some people believe that depression is "normal" in people who are elderly, have other health problems, have setbacks or other tragedies, or have bad life situations. On the contrary, clinical depression is always abnormal and always requires attention from a medical or [mental-health](#) professional. The good news is that depression can be diagnosed and treated effectively in most people. The biggest barrier to overcoming depression is recognizing that someone is depressed and seeking appropriate treatment.

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