

# PSYCH 101

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## Depression

Depression is a complex mental health condition that affects millions of people worldwide. According to the American Psychiatric Association, depression affects an estimated 1 in 15 adults in any given year—and 1 in 6 people will experience depression at some point in their life. People of all ages, genders and backgrounds experience symptoms of depression. Due to its prevalence, that means it's likely that you—or your friends, family or co-workers—could be affected by depression at any time. So, if you have depression, you're not alone.

### Types of Depression

Everyone experiences depression differently, and there are various types of depression. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) outlines several types of depression, including the following:

- **Major depressive disorder**, or clinical depression, is characterized by a consistent dark mood that consumes a person. It can inhibit daily functions and cause them to lose interest in hobbies or activities they usually enjoy.
- **Persistent depressive disorder** is diagnosed when a low mood lasts for two or more years in adults and at least one year in children and adolescents. A person with this disorder may experience episodes of major depressive disorder along with periods of less severe symptoms where they are able to function day-to-day.
- **Postpartum depression** can affect women after having a baby, beginning weeks to months after childbirth. It causes intense, long-lasting feelings of anxiety, sadness and fatigue. Postpartum depression can make it difficult for mothers to care for themselves or their babies and handle daily responsibilities.
- **Seasonal affective disorder** (also known as SAD) comes and goes with seasons, often occurring during fall and winter.
- **Psychotic depression** is a form of depression with psychosis, such as delusions (e.g., false beliefs) or hallucinations (e.g., hearing or seeing things that are not there).

Many people who experience depression also have other mental health conditions. For example, depression and anxiety disorders commonly occur together.

### Causes

A variety of genetic, environmental, psychological and biochemical factors can cause depression. A person often has an increased risk of depression if their family has a history of depression, they have experienced trauma, major life changes, stress or certain physical illnesses (e.g., cancer), or as a medication side effect.

### Symptoms

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, to be diagnosed with depression, an individual must have five depression symptoms every day, nearly all day and for at least two weeks. One of the symptoms must be a depressed mood or a loss of interest or pleasure in almost all activities. Children and adolescents may be irritable rather than sad. Here are common symptoms of depression:

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities or hobbies
- Irritability, frustration or restlessness
- Feeling guilty, worthless or helpless
- Difficulty sleeping (e.g., having trouble falling asleep, staying asleep and waking up too early) or sleeping too much
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details or making decisions
- Changes in weight or appetite (e.g., eating more than usual, eating less than usual or having no appetite)
- Aches, pains, headaches or stomach problems without a clear physical cause and don't ease with treatment
- Thinking about harming yourself

## Treatment

SAMHSA reports that depression is one of the most common and treatable mental health disorders. Early, continuous treatment can help you gain control of your symptoms. Effective treatments often include medications (e.g., antidepressants and mood stabilizers) and psychotherapy (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy). Alternative approaches, such as light therapy, acupuncture and nutrition, may also be considered as part of a comprehensive treatment plan. It may take some trial and error to find an effective depression treatment; however, once you begin treatment, you should gradually start to feel better.

## Summary

Depression is debilitating and shows up differently in people. As such, it's important to understand what depression is and its potential symptoms. If you feel sad or down and your depression symptoms are interacting with how you can handle daily activities, contact your doctor or a mental health professional.

If you need mental health-related crisis support or are worried about someone else, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available by calling or texting 988 and chatting online at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org). Help is available in both English and Spanish.

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