

Alcohol, Other Drugs, and Behavior: Psychological Research Perspectives

Everyone can feel sad or overwhelmed at times. But depression is a chronic feeling of emptiness, sadness, or inability to feel pleasure that may appear to happen for no clear reason. It is distinct from grief and other emotions a person may feel following difficult life events. Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). It can undermine a person's relationships, make working and maintaining good health very difficult, and in severe cases, may lead to suicide. In fact, depression contributes to nearly 40,000 suicides in the United States each year. It can affect adults, adolescents, and children. This article examines what depression is and what causes it, as well as types of depression, treatment, and more. Share on Pinterest Camrin Dengel/Stocksy

What is depression? Depression is a mood disorder that causes persistent feelings of sadness, emptiness, and loss of joy. It is different from the mood fluctuations that people regularly experience as a part of life. Major life events, such as bereavement or the loss of a job, can trigger depression. But depression is distinct from the negative feelings a person may temporarily have in response to a difficult life event. Depression often persists in spite of a change of circumstances and causes feelings that are intense, chronic, and not proportional to a person's circumstances. It is an ongoing problem, not a passing one. While there are different types of depression, the most common one is major depressive disorder. It consists of episodes during which the symptoms last for at least two weeks. Depression can last for several weeks, months, or years. For many people, it is a chronic illness that gets better and then relapses.

Is it curable? While there is no cure for depression, there are effective treatments that help with recovery. The earlier that treatment starts, the more successful it may be. Some people may never experience depression again after a single period of it. Others will continue to have relapses. Many people experiencing depression recover after a treatment plan. Even with effective treatment, however, a relapse may occur. About half of people do not initially respond to treatment. To prevent relapse, people who take medication for depression should continue with treatment " even after symptoms improve or go away " for as long as their doctor advises. Find tips to help prevent depression from returning here.

Signs and symptoms Depression can cause a range of psychological and physical symptoms, including :

loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities

changes in appetite and body weight

unusually slow or agitated movements

slow or agitated movements decreased energy or fatigue

difficulty sleeping or oversleeping

P

excessive feelings of guilt or worthlessness

difficulty concentrating or making decisions

thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts If a person experiences five or more of these symptoms during the same 2-week period, a doctor may diagnose them with depression. Depression may also cause other symptoms, including irritability, restlessness, chronic pain, headaches, and digestive issues.

Types of depression There are several forms of depression. Below are some of the most common types. Major depression A person living with major depression experiences a constant state of sadness. They may lose interest in activities they used to enjoy. Treatment usually involves medication and psychotherapy. Persistent depressive disorder Also known as dysthymia, persistent depressive disorder causes symptoms that last for at least 2 years . A person living with this disorder may have episodes of major depression as well as milder symptoms that do not meet the criteria for major depressive disorder. Postpartum depression After giving birth, some people experience a brief period of sadness or heightened emotions that some people call the "baby blues." This usually goes away in a few days to a few weeks. Postpartum depression, or postnatal depression, is more severe. There is no single cause for this type of depression, and it can persist for months or years. Anyone who experiences ongoing depression after delivery should seek medical attention. Major depressive disorder with seasonal pattern Previously known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD), this type of depression usually occurs during the winter and fall months, when there is less daylight. Less commonly, it may follow other seasonal patterns. It lifts during the rest of the year and in response to light therapy. This condition seems to particularly affect people who live in countries with long or severe winters.

Triggers Triggers are emotional, psychological, or physical events or circumstances that can cause depression symptoms to appear or return. These are some of the most common triggers: stressful life events, such as loss, family conflicts, and changes in relationships

incomplete recovery after having stopped depression treatment too soon

medical conditions, especially a medical crisis such as a new diagnosis or a chronic illness such as heart disease or diabetes Find out more about depression triggers here.

Risk factors Some people have a higher risk of depression than others. Risk factors include : experiencing certain life events, such as bereavement, work issues, changes in relationships, financial problems, and medical concerns

experiencing acute stress

having a lack of successful coping strategies

having a close relative with depression

using some prescription drugs, such as corticosteroids, certain beta-blockers, and interferon

using recreational drugs, such as alcohol or amphetamines

having sustained a head injury

having a neurodegenerative disease such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's

having had a previous episode of major depression

having a chronic condition, such as diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or cardiovascular disease

living with chronic pain

lacking social support

Depression as a symptom Depression can also occur as a symptom or comorbidity with another mental health condition. Examples include: Psychotic depression Psychosis can involve delusions, such as false beliefs and a detachment from reality. It can also involve hallucinations " sensing things that do not exist. Some people experience depression with psychosis. A person living with psychosis, which is a serious psychiatric illness, may experience depression as a result. Alternatively, a person living with depression may have a severe form of the condition that also includes psychosis symptoms. Bipolar disorder Depression is a common symptom of bipolar disorder. People with bipolar disorder

experience periods of depression that may last weeks. They also experience periods of mania, which is an elevated mood that may cause a person to feel very happy, aggressive, or out of control. What does bipolar disorder involve, and what types are there? Find out here.

Diagnosis If a person suspects that they have symptoms of depression, they should seek professional help from a doctor or mental health specialist. A qualified health professional can rule out various causes, ensure an accurate diagnosis, and provide safe and effective treatment. They will ask questions about symptoms, such as how long they have been present. A doctor may also conduct an examination to check for physical causes and order a blood test to rule out other health conditions. What is the difference between situational and clinical depression? Find out here. **Tests** Mental health professionals often ask people to complete questionnaires to help assess the severity of their depression. The Hamilton Depression Rating Scale, for example, has 21 questions. The scores indicate the severity of depression among people who already have a diagnosis. The Beck Depression Inventory is another questionnaire that helps mental health professionals measure a person's symptoms.

Support hotline National hotlines provide free, confidential assistance from trained professionals 24 hours a day. They may benefit anyone with depression who wants or needs to talk about their feelings. Some of the support hotlines available include: **Samaritans:** This nonprofit organization offers emotional support to anyone who has feelings of depression or loneliness or who is considering suicide. Call or text 877-870-4673 (HOPE).

This nonprofit organization offers emotional support to anyone who has feelings of depression or loneliness or who is considering suicide. Call or text 877-870-4673 (HOPE). **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** Call 1-800-273- 8255 (TALK) to speak with someone from this national network of local crisis centers.

Call 1-800-273- 8255 (TALK) to speak with someone from this national network of local crisis centers. **Lifeline Chat:** This is an online chat service of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

This is an online chat service of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. **Postpartum Support International:** Call 1-800-944-4773. This organization helps people struggling with postpartum depression, as well as other mental health issues that are related to pregnancy, birth, and new parenthood. **Suicide prevention** If you know someone at immediate risk of self-harm, suicide, or hurting another person: Ask the tough question: "Are you considering suicide?"

Listen to the person without judgment.

Call 911 or the local emergency number, or text TALK to 741741 to communicate with a trained crisis counselor.

Stay with the person until professional help arrives.

Try to remove any weapons, medications, or other potentially harmful objects. If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, a prevention hotline can help. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available 24 hours a day at 988. During a crisis, people who are hard of hearing can use their preferred relay service or dial 711 then 988. Click [here](#) for more links and local resources.

Is depression genetic? A person with a parent or sibling who has depression is about three times more likely than other people to develop the condition. However, many people with depression have no family history of it. A recent study suggests that susceptibility to depression may not result from genetic variation. The researchers acknowledge that while people can inherit depression, many other issues also influence its development. Learn more about whether depression has a genetic link [here](#).

Is it a disability? Depression is the leading cause of disability around the world, according to the WHO. In the U.S., the Social Security Administration considers depressive, bipolar, and related disorders to be disabilities. If a person's depression prevents them from working, they may qualify for social security disability insurance benefits. The person must have worked long enough and recently enough to qualify for disability benefits. For more information, visit the administration's website.

Statistics According to the CDC, about 11% of physician office visits note depression on the medical record. The figure is similar for emergency department visits. Also according to the CDC, 4.4% of children and adolescents between the ages of 3 and 17 years " about 2.7 million people in the U.S. " have a diagnosis of depression. The CDC also note that 4.7% of American adults have regular feelings of depression.

Frequently asked questions Here are some common questions about depression. What does depression do to the brain? Depression can lead to changes in levels of neurotransmitters, which are molecules that transmit messages between nerve cells. In the long run, it may also cause physical changes to the brain, including reductions in grey matter

volume and increased inflammation. Does depression change your personality? Research has turned up mixed results about whether or not depression can actually change a person's personality. However, according to one review of 10 studies, depressive symptoms may be associated with changes in several specific aspects of personality " including extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness " which could be temporary or persistent. Does depression affect your thinking? Depression can alter concentration and decision-making. It may also impair attention and cause issues with information processing and memory.

Reference

[Plague: One Scientist's Intrepid Search for the Truth about Human Retroviruses and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome \(ME/CFS\), Autism, and Other Diseases](#)

[Introduction to Power Analysis: Two-Group Studies \(Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences\)](#)