

the type of treatment you have, your chances of staying well for six months on continuation treatment are extremely good.

In cases of recurrent depression (three or more episodes), a third step, called maintenance treatment, is used to treat the depression. In maintenance treatment, you stay on the treatment for a longer period of time. The purpose of maintenance treatment is to prevent recurrence of the depression. With maintenance treatment, the chances of staying well are also extremely good.

A common misunderstanding is that if you feel better, you no longer need the antidepressant medication. However, if you stop taking the medication too soon, you may start to feel the same symptoms again. Your medication is key to your recovery. It is very important that you talk to your doctor before stopping or changing an antidepressant medication.

When You Are Taking Anti-depressant Medication

- > Since new medication will take several weeks to work, it is recommended that you have at least three follow-up visits in the first three months.
- > If these appointments have not been scheduled, you should call the provider who prescribed your antidepressant now to make the follow-up visits.
- > Use a calendar to chart your weekly progress with taking your antidepressant and keeping your follow-up visits during the initial six months of treatment.

Helpful Resources/ Web sites

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

(800) 826-3632 or www.dbsalliance.org

Provides information about depression and bipolar disorder. Includes a directory of support groups and confidential screening tests.

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)

(800) 950-NAMI (6264) or www.nami.org

A self-help, support, and advocacy organization of consumers, families, and friends of people with severe mental illness.

National Institute of Mental Health

(866) 615-6464 or www.nimh.nih.gov

Provides information about the symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of mental illnesses. Included are brochures and information sheets, reports, press releases, fact sheets, and other educational information.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

National Mental Health Information Center

(800) 789-2647 or www.mentalhealth.org

Provides information about federal, state, and local organizations dedicated to treating and preventing mental illness.

Depression: Causes and Treatment



TUFTS  Health Plan

No one does more to keep you healthy.

705 Mt. Auburn Street
Watertown, MA 02472

Mental Health Department—800-208-9565

www.tuftshealthplan.com

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What is Depression?

Everyone feels down or blue at times. But when these feelings linger and interfere with your functioning, you need to consider whether you are suffering from depression. The two main types of depression are major depressive disorder, which is more intense; and dysthymic disorder, which is chronic and mild.

How Prevalent is Depression?

Major Depressive Disorder

- > It is the leading cause of disability in the U.S. for people aged 15–44.
- > Approximately 14.8 million American adults, or about 6.7 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older, are affected in a given year.
- > While it can develop at any age, the median age at onset is 32.
- > It is more prevalent in women than in men.

Dysthymic Disorder

- > Approximately 3.3 million American adults, or about 1.5 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older, are affected in a given year.
- > The median age of onset of dysthymic disorder is 31.

What are the Symptoms of Major Depressive Disorder?

People with major depression have five or more symptoms nearly every day, all day, for at least two weeks. For some people, this disorder recurs several times in their lives. The following is a list of symptoms:

- Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy
- Feeling sad, blue, or down in the dumps
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Increase or decrease in appetite or weight
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Problems concentrating, thinking, remembering, or making decisions
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Loss of energy or feeling tired all of the time

What are the Symptoms of Dysthymic Disorder?

Dysthymia is a chronic, mild type of depression. People experience a depressed mood for most of the day, for more days than not, and for at least two years. The following is a list of symptoms:

- Poor appetite or overeating
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Low energy or fatigue
- Low self-esteem
- Poor concentration or difficulty making decisions
- Feelings of hopelessness

Functioning is usually not greatly impaired and people may not be aware they are depressed. They are able to work and manage their lives, but they are often irritable and complain about stress.

What are Other Possible Symptoms of Depression?

With any depression, there are often other physical or psychological symptoms, such as headaches, other aches and pains, digestive problems, sexual problems, feeling pessimistic or hopeless, and being anxious or worried. Due to cultural differences around emotional expression, men and women may express depression differently, resulting in depression masquerading as anger or risky behavior.

What Causes Depression?

Depression may be caused by many things, including:

- > Genetics
- > Other general medical illnesses
- > Certain medicines
- > Drugs or alcohol
- > Other psychiatric conditions
- > Recent significant loss

Depression is not something to be ashamed of, nor is it your fault. It is not a personality weakness or character flaw. It is a medical illness. You cannot “snap out of it” any more than you can with a medical illness.

Depression is Treatable

How is depression treated?

To keep you healthy, your health care provider relies on information from you. You need not feel rushed or embarrassed when talking to your health care provider about feeling depressed. Your provider is there to help you.

Your health care provider will determine if there is a physical cause for your depression.

The earlier you get treatment for your depression, the sooner you will begin to feel better. As with other medical illnesses, the longer you have the depression before you seek treatment, the more difficult it can be to treat.

The major treatments for depression are:

- > Antidepressant medications. They work by affecting the brain's chemistry. Some people may experience side effects from antidepressants, which include headache, nausea, insomnia, agitation, and/or sexual problems. Some side effects are temporary and mild.
- > Psychotherapy (talk therapy). This can be an important part of treatment. A good therapist can help you cope with the feelings you are having and change the patterns that contribute to your illness.
- > Antidepressant medicine combined with psychotherapy. For some people, either medicine or psychotherapy may be enough, but for others, a combination of the two treatments is most effective.

Depression is usually treated in two steps:

- > First: Acute treatment
The aim of acute treatment is to remove the symptoms of depression until you feel well.
- > Second: Continuation treatment
Continuation of treatment (continuing the treatment for some time after you are well) is important because it keeps the episode of depression from coming back. Depending on