

## DID YOU KNOW?

*A common myth about depression is that people should just deal with their problems and get over themselves. Not true at all. Depression is a mental health disorder, not a symptom of weakness.*

## Chapter **1**

# Understanding Depression

From that Sunday blues feeling that many people experience before beginning the workweek, to literally being unable to get out of bed, depression has a big tent. This chapter describes symptoms and types of depression, as well as how depression differs from other mental health disorders.

## What Is Depression?

Depression is a mental health condition that includes persistent feelings of sadness and beliefs that the future is hopeless and that life

is joyless and lacks meaning. Depression affects all aspects of life, including:

- » Thoughts
- » Behaviors
- » Feelings
- » Relationships

Many people suffer from depression from time to time. They may have a temporary feeling of sadness and pessimism; these feelings are often related to real-life stressors that seem overwhelming. However, when those feelings last longer than a few weeks, the normal feeling of depression becomes a disorder that requires treatment.

## What Is Major Depressive Disorder?

*Major depressive disorder* occurs when sadness, loss of interest, and loss of pleasure persist over weeks. Along with that low mood, other symptoms occur, including:

- » *Apathy* (lack of interest or caring)
- » Changes in activity level
- » Changes in appetite
- » Changes in sleep patterns
- » Fatigue
- » Intense feelings of guilt

- » Loss of self-esteem
- » Poor concentration
- » Thoughts of suicide or death

Someone with major depression may literally have trouble getting out of bed. Dark despair grabs hold of a person's life and squeezes out the possibility of pleasure.

## How Does Depression Differ from Sadness or Grief?

When you lose someone or something you love, you experience grief, which includes sadness, fatigue, problems sleeping, changes in appetite, and not being able to get anything done. You may even have thoughts of ending your life.

Like depression, grief ebbs and flows. Unlike depression, grief usually subsides over time. That time varies greatly — months or years. But over time, the pain of grief is not as overwhelming and intense. However, grief that does not resolve can evolve into depression. At that point, professional help is recommended.



TIP

You may be concerned about yourself or someone you care about during the experience of grief. Support groups can be a good source of help. If support groups aren't enough, ask your primary care provider to evaluate whether other treatment is warranted. Or make an appointment with a mental health provider who specializes in grief.

# How Common Is Depression?

More than 15 percent of the U.S. population will experience depression during their lifetime. At any one time, about 6 percent to 8 percent of the U.S. population is currently experiencing depression. Young adults and females are more likely to have depression than adult males. Generally, having one major depressive episode puts you at greater risk for relapses, especially without treatment.

## Can Depression Be Prevented?

Depression cannot be prevented, but it can be reduced, and the symptoms can be milder with the right interventions. Depression is often connected to stressful events, which can lead to changes in thinking. These patterns of negative thinking include thoughts like the following:

- » Everything I do turns out to be wrong.
- » Nothing will ever get better for me.
- » The world is going to end soon.

When you have insight into your negative thinking patterns, you can catch depression in its early stages and get treatment (see Chapters 9 and 10).

# What Are the Different Types of Depression?

Mental health professionals create labels to describe the clusters of symptoms that form types of depression. Although the various forms of depression have similarities, such as sadness and lack of interest, they do have differences. The following are types of depression:

- » **Major depressive disorder:** Persistent sadness; lack of interest; changes in appetite and sleep; and feelings of guilt and worthlessness. Sometimes includes a wish to harm oneself.
- » **Persistent depressive disorder:** Chronic symptoms of major depression that are milder but last for at least two years.
- » **Disruptive mood dysregulation disorder:** Diagnosed in children and adolescents. Chronic irritability and angry outbursts, almost always starting before the age of ten.
- » **Premenstrual dysphoric disorder:** Depression, anxiety, and irritability that start prior to a menstrual period and ends shortly after.
- » **Seasonal affective disorder:** Symptoms of a major depressive disorder that generally start when the days get shorter in the fall and resolve in the spring.
- » **Postpartum depression:** Major depressive symptoms that begin shortly after giving birth.

- » **Adjustment disorder with depressed mood:** Depression following a significant loss or trauma that lasts long enough to interfere with daily life.
- » **Depression associated with disease or drugs:** Depression caused by or as a result of experiencing a medical condition or as a side effect of a medication or drug.

## What's the Difference between Major Depression and Persistent Depressive Disorder?

Think about the difference between a cold and the flu. A cold can be very distressing and annoying, especially if it lingers and persists with a runny nose and a chronic cough. However, when necessary, most people with colds can muddle through the day. They're able to get dressed, feed themselves, and do what needs to be done. They may feel tired and may take a nap.

Now consider the flu. The fever, nausea, and aches and pains of the flu often make it impossible to get the smallest thing done. Many people with the flu need to stay in bed and, at most, eat some crackers or toast.

*Persistent depressive disorder* (formerly known as *dysthymia*) is more like a cold — lots of people with persistent depressive disorder function, just not as well. Major depression, on the other hand, is like the flu — those with major depression have a difficult time getting through the day.



Throughout this book, I use the term *depression* to describe the various symptoms that are usually associated with major depressive disorder.

## What's the Difference between Depression and Bipolar Disorder?

Depression and bipolar disorder have some similarities, but they aren't the same. Both conditions generally involve a depressed mood for periods of time. And when a person is depressed, symptoms include sadness, sleep problems, eating changes, and loss of pleasure.

However, in bipolar disorder, moods swing — sometimes from deep depression to extreme mania. Manic symptoms include restless energy, sleeplessness, risky behaviors, poor decision-making, talking too fast, and extremely poor judgment.

# What's the Difference between Depression and Anxiety?

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Anxiety and depression are the two most common mental health disorders. They can both be highly disruptive and interfere with normal functioning. Both can result in poor sleep, change in appetite, and a tendency to isolate. However, they have distinct symptoms.

Depression involves sadness, pessimism, loss of pleasure, and fatigue. Anxiety is a fear-based reaction; it's accompanied by significant physical symptoms such as elevated heart rate, sweaty hands, stomach upset, and muscle aches. Untreated, anxiety can lead to depression.