

Tipsheet: Depression Symptoms & Resources

Depression is one type of mental illness. It is a serious, complex and debilitating condition that can be life-threatening. It affects men and women of every age, social group and ethnicity. Depression is not a personal weakness.

Almost 58 million (one in four) Americans 18 and older suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder every year. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, the economic burden of mental illness, including suicide, is more than the disease burden caused by all cancers.

Symptoms

- Anxiety / panic attacks (heart racing, difficulty breathing)
- Catatonic state (rare but life-threatening)
- Consistent fatigue or lack of energy
- Engaging in high-risk behavior: drug use, unprotected sex with multiple partners, etc.
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Frequent nightmares
- Indecision or inability to concentrate
- Irritability
- Lack of self-care: not washing hair, not bathing, laundry piling up, etc.
- Little or no interest or pleasure in activities the person used to enjoy
- Persistent sadness or emptiness, lasting weeks or longer
- Recurrent thoughts / expressions of death or suicide
- Significant weight loss or gain without trying
- Trouble sleeping or constant tiredness

Helping Yourself

- Be gentle with and forgiving of yourself. Don't keep blaming yourself for / focusing on the past.
- Don't isolate yourself from your loved ones; you might feel like it, but you aren't a "burden."
- Find a support group. Many people benefit from being around others in similar situations (see below resources).
- Reach out to a friend, family member, clergy, etc. Often, people aren't aware you're suffering and are more than willing to help. There is no shame in having depression—it is not a personal fault.
- Remember that your thought process is distorted right now and avoid making major or rash decisions.
- Seek trained help. A professional can help diagnose the type of depression you're experiencing and can help with the treatment / management / recovery process. Many employers offer a free Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for emergency counseling. Your human resources manager or your union representative should have the contact information. (See below resources if self- or unemployed.)
- Try to stay active, like going for a short walk. Exercise has been proven to elevate mood.

Helping a Loved One

- Be gentle. Avoid guilt trips, criticism and confrontation—your loved one is already full of self-criticism.
- Encourage your loved one to be around others. Invite them to your house, pick them up for coffee or bring them with you on errands. But don't be offended or become pushy if they decline. Sometimes just the *offer* to "hang out" with you makes a difference.
- Help your loved one seek professional help. A professional can help diagnose their type of depression (there are several) and can help in the treatment / management / recovery process.
- Know that everyday tasks (like laundry, shopping) are very difficult right now. Ask if they'd like to go grocery shopping with you.
- Never say "get over it" or "pull up your bootstraps." This isn't possible, as depression is an illness, like diabetes.
- Seek support for yourself, as well. Establish and maintain healthy boundaries when dealing with a loved one's depression. Overextending yourself won't help anyone.
- Take all talk of or threats of suicide seriously.
- Take care of yourself. Caring and worrying about a loved one with depression can be consuming, but it's important to continue taking care of your own needs like eating right, exercising, etc.
- Call or stop by frequently. Take the initiative (repeatedly) and check on your loved one.



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- Treat your loved one with respect.

Source: American Psychiatric Association, National Institute of Mental Health, Fairview/University Medical Center

Resources & More Info.

- **United Way 2-1-1™**
Locate mental health resources in your neighborhood? Help is free, confidential and available 24/7. Just dial 2-1-1. Cell phone users can call 651-291-0211.
- **Mental Health Association of Minnesota**
United Way partner agency offers an anxiety screening tool and can help you find access to services or problem-solve a situation on a one-to-one basis. 612-331-6840 / 800-862-1799, www.mentalhealthmn.org/
- **National Institute of Mental Health**
www.nimh.nih.gov/
- View all United Way [health and independence partner agencies](#).
- Learn how you can [boost your self-esteem](#).