

Understanding Depression

Have you ever said “I am really depressed”? At such times, it is important to ask if we are **depressed** or **sad**, then discuss such concerns with a doctor. This is an especially critical distinction as we age because of the tendency for many people to confuse depression and sadness. Sometimes we call ourselves ‘depressed’ to describe the down or sad feelings that we all experience from time to time. When you have depression, you have trouble functioning in work, home or social relationships for more than two weeks (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016). Being sad is a normal part of life. Being depressed is **not** a normal part of life **at any age**.

Symptoms of Depression

- A persistent sad or low mood
- Feeling guilty, hopeless, or worthless
- Feeling nervous or “empty”
- Excessive fatigue or loss of energy
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Difficulties sleeping or staying awake
- Eating more or less than usual
- Restlessness or agitation
- Persistent headaches, stomach aches, or chronic pain
- Moving or talking more slowly than usual
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Feeling as if life is not worth living
- Thoughts of suicide or death

Depression is not a normal part of aging.



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Some Causes of Depression

Depression can result from a range of causes, including genetics, biological changes in the brain, illness, adverse drug reactions, or stressful life events such as loss of a spouse, the sale of one’s home, or retirement. (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016)

Take Action

Maintain Good Mental Health

If you have experienced any of these depression symptoms for more than two weeks, it is important to acknowledge that you may need treatment. Getting treatment is a sign of strength. Discuss your symptoms with your doctor.

Things You Can Say to Start a Discussion with Your Doctor

- I feel sad most of the time.
- I feel worn out and tired most of the time.
- I'm having difficulty sleeping.
- I just can't seem to get past the loss of my spouse or friend.
- I've been "down in the dumps" and nothing seems to cheer me up.
- I just don't enjoy life anymore.
- I have been crying a lot lately.
- I feel like people don't like me.
- I feel like my life is not worth living.



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Clip Art, Senior Citizens*

For most people, depression will get better with treatment.

Diagnosing and Treating Depression

As you saw earlier, there are a number of symptoms of depression. Not every person will experience the same symptoms. "Some people have only a few symptoms, while others have many. Symptoms can vary over time." (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, 2016). It is important, therefore, to have a thorough evaluation by your family doctor.

The good news is that depression is treatable. Two major types of treatment include medication and psychotherapy, individually or together (National Institutes of Mental Health, 2016). Begin with your family doctor to seek treatment. If you don't have a family doctor, look in the telephone directory or on the internet for "mental health providers" "behavioral health providers" or "social workers" to find help in your area.

Sharing the Wealth on Health

Tips for Promoting Mental Health

- Encourage your friends and family to follow all of the “10 Keys”™ to Healthy Aging. Improving your overall health and being physically and socially active can improve your mood and help reduce symptoms of depression. Also be aware that people who are depressed often do not seek help for other health problems. Treating depression can lead to a better life and better health.
- If you spend a lot of time with someone who you believe is depressed, don't forget how important it is to take care of yourself. It can be difficult to live or work closely with someone with depression, and seeing a counselor or psychiatrist can help you, as well as provide an excellent example for those around you.
- Fight stigma against people with mental illness. When someone appears to be different, we may view him or her in a negative way. This is known as stigma. Stigma is a reality for people with depression and other mental illnesses. They report that how others judge them is one of their greatest problems when trying to live a complete and satisfying life. Many people have been led to believe that a person with depression has a weak character. This is not true. Often the only way to know whether someone has a mental illness is if he or she tells you. Most people don't realize that many people they know suffer from depression.
- Write down some things you might say to someone to encourage him or her to get an evaluation for depression. Consider statements like: “You seem down to me. Is that true?” or “I'm concerned about you being so much quieter than you used to be. I encourage you to make an appointment with your doctor. I'll go with you if you'd like me to.”



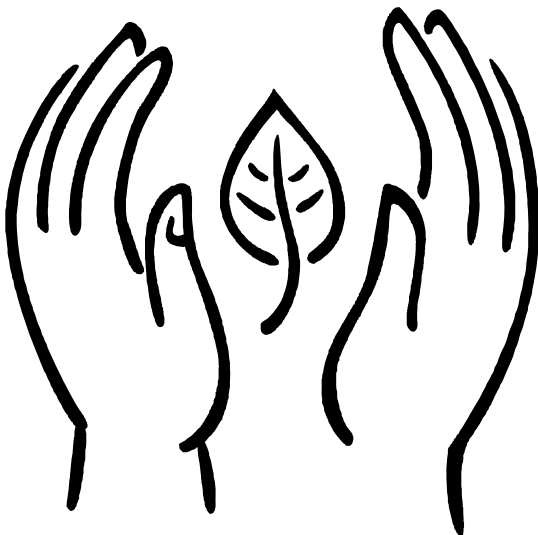
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Ideas for Promoting Mental Health in Others

Depression

Personal Goals & Action Steps

My Personal Mental Health Goals: _____



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Clip Art, Hands

Steps Toward Attaining My Goals

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Take-Home Activity #1

Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS) Short Form

Choose the best answer for how you have felt over the past week.

1. Are you basically satisfied with your life?	Yes	No
2. Have you dropped many of your activities and interests?	Yes	No
3. Do you feel that your life is empty?	Yes	No
4. Do you often get bored?	Yes	No
5. Are you in good spirits most of the time?	Yes	No
6. Are you afraid that something bad is going to happen to you?	Yes	No
7. Do you feel happy most of the time?	Yes	No
8. Do you often feel helpless?	Yes	No
9. Do you prefer to stay at home rather than going out and doing things?	Yes	No
10. Do you feel you have more problems with memory than most?	Yes	No
11. Do you think it is wonderful to be alive now?	Yes	No
12. Do you feel pretty worthless the way you are now?	Yes	No
13. Do you feel full of energy?	Yes	No
14. Do you feel that your situation is hopeless?	Yes	No
15. Do you think that most people are better off than you are?	Yes	No

Score 1 point for every "yes" in questions 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15

Score 1 point for every "no" in questions 1, 5, 7, 11, 13

A total score of greater than 5 suggests the need to see a doctor. If you have any concerns about your response call the doctor for further discussion and evaluation.

(Sheikh & Yesavage, 1986)

Depression

Take-Home Activity #2

If you are experiencing symptoms of depression, the most important thing you can do is to see a doctor. Your doctor can recommend a psychiatrist or psychologist as they specialize in depression and other mental health concerns.

Contact a trusted healthcare provider and ask for a recommendation for a mental health provider in your area. Even if you feel that you do not need to meet with this person at this time, it is always good to have the name and number of someone in case you do feel the need to talk or want to have a name to give to others.

Name of Psychiatrist/Psychologist

Phone Number

In addition to your doctor, there are many other organizations that can provide help in dealing with depression. **Write down** one or two of these local resources and their phone numbers below. Also ask if they have a 24-hour phone number that you could call if you had questions or concerns.

The following list is an example of some of the other available resources. Not every program may be available in your community, but you may be surprised at how many you find. **Some resources to explore:** local hospitals, spiritual leaders, community mental health centers, peer counseling programs, university depression research programs, employee assistance programs, family service agencies, and private clinics or facilities.

Organization

Phone Number

24-Hour Phone Number

Organization

Phone Number

24-Hour Phone Number

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Geriatric Psychiatrist?

A medical doctor who has special training in mental health in older adults.

What is clinical depression?

A sad mood that lasts two weeks or longer and affects your ability to perform daily activities such as work, socialization, self-care, pleasure, etc.



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How can depression medications help?

Medications for depression help to increase your level of serotonin (a chemical in the body). It usually takes 2 or more weeks for the medication to begin working. Medication reduces the symptoms of depression, but doesn't change your personality.

I have side effects from my antidepressants. Are they worth taking?

"You may need to try several different antidepressant medicines before finding the one that improves your symptoms and has manageable side effects. A medication that has helped you or a close family member in the past will often be considered." (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016)

If I feel fine, can I stop taking my antidepressant?

Many individuals "feel fine" because the medication has controlled the depression. It is extremely important to discuss the desire to stop medication with your physician. Stopping some antidepressants suddenly can cause serious withdrawal symptoms.

The questions I still have about depression are: _____
