

# Depression is Treatable

*Courtesy of AARP*

Everyone feels sad or gets the blues now and then. But if these feelings last more than two weeks, you could have depression.

Depression is a common illness. Close to 19 million people each year develop a problem with depression, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. It happens to one in four women and one in 10 men some time in their lives.

The good news is that depression can be treated. With proper treatment, most people start to feel better in a few weeks. Without treatment, depression is a serious illness.

## How Do You Know If You Are Depressed?

People who are depressed won't start feeling better after a short time. In fact, they might stay sad for months or even years if they don't get help. Without treatment, depression can get worse. It can affect your physical and emotional health causing problems at work, at home, and in social relationships.

Other common signs of depression are:

- Feeling empty, tired, or hopeless
- Losing interest or pleasure in activities
- Feeling restless, anxious, or irritable
- Oversleeping or not being able to sleep
- Not eating or eating too much
- Having unexplained aches and pains
- Having trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Thinking about dying or killing yourself

## What Causes Depression?

There is no one cause of depression. It runs in some families but people with no family history also become depressed. Other causes include:

- Stressful life changes, such as getting divorced, losing a job or loved one, or developing a serious illness
- Certain medications
- Alcohol
- Seasonal changes

Some people, including some doctors, think depression is normal in older people. It's not. And when older people become depressed, doctors might not recognize it. That's because older people might not talk about their feelings or because they have other health conditions that need attention.

There is evidence that some kinds of depression are caused by an imbalance of a body chemical called serotonin. Whatever the cause, it's important to remember that most of the time, depression responds to treatment. Without treatment, serious depression can lead to suicide.

## Suicide

Never take suicide threats or feelings lightly. If you hear someone threaten suicide - or ever feel suicidal yourself, call your local suicide crisis center immediately. It is not true that people who talk about killing themselves never do it. They do!

## How is Depression Treated?

For some people, the treatment that helps their depression is medicine. For others it might be "talk therapy" with a trained health care professional. A combination of the two treatments is also common. If one medicine doesn't work, you might need to try another, or even several different kinds before you find the right one. There are many anti-depressants.

The same is true of therapy. If one therapist isn't helpful, try someone else. Make sure the person you choose is a licensed therapist.

The key is to stick with your treatment. Don't ignore depression or hope that it will go away on its own. Depression is the leading cause of suicide. More than 80 percent of people with depression can feel better with treatment.

### **Where Do I Go For Help?**

Social workers, family counselors, spiritual counselors at your place of worship, psychologists, and psychiatrists all provide mental health counseling. Since psychiatrists are medical doctors, they also can prescribe medication if you need it.

You can ask your family doctor, as well as friends or relatives, for the name of a good therapist. Your doctor also can help you decide what kind of therapist might be best able to help you.

You also can contact your employee assistance program at work, or local hospital or mental health association. Many local organizations offer free depression screening. There is even an online screening test sponsored by the National Mental Health Association to help you learn if you are depressed.

Trying to "snap out of it" isn't a good way to cope with depression. Most of the time, it just doesn't work. Getting medical help does. You don't have to stay depressed. With proper care, you can lift that dark cloud and put joy and meaning back into your life.