

Depression

Overview: Depression is a common disorder, which is estimated to affect up to five percent of all Americans over the age of 18 throughout the course of a year. Depression is sometimes associated with mania, the opposite mood disorder, in which the individual may feel hyper or very excitable. Both disorders can occur together. This is referred to as Manic-Depressive Disorder. More frequently, depression is experienced by itself. Depression is more common in women than in men and usually begins after the age of 25. Most patients will suffer from multiple episodes, and some patients are even prone to a chronic depressive disorder.

Diagnosis: Patients will complain of a wide variety of symptoms, including:

Sadness	Sleep problems including early morning awakening
Anxiety	Poor eating habits
Fatigue	Difficulty concentrating and remembering
Lack energy	Difficulty making decisions
Loss of interest in sex and ordinary activities	Irritability
Loss of weight	
Suicidal thoughts	

Causes of depression may include:

Loss of health	Side effects of drugs, such as those used to treat high blood pressure
Physical disorders such as Parkinson's disease, stroke and hormonal problems	Genetics
Loss of a loved one	
Changes in brain chemistry that can affect the mood	

Ultimately, the diagnosis of depression is a clinical one. There are no specific tests that can determine a patient's mood. A doctor may, however, order x-rays and blood work to rule out underlying physical ailments as a precaution.

Treatment: Treatment of depression is usually very successful. Frequently, a combination of psychotherapy and medications can resolve the mood disorder. Psychotherapy may be one on one or through a support group. Support groups have the added advantage of low costs and can continue long-term. Counseling sessions can help patients recognize and change negative thinking that has led to depression.

Older patients are particularly prone to depression. The elderly life circumstances tend to complicate depression quite often (e.g. living alone, loss of loved ones, health problems, etc.). It is important to change this life style and become involved in community activity, senior centers, volunteer services and to live with other people. There are many geriatric villages throughout the country and are available in most communities. Seniors band together for mutual support and social interaction in these communities.

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If you are prone to depression, take an active approach to treatment. Talk to your doctor and take the prescribed medications. Get involved with a counselor or support group and consider moving to an environment where you will have more social outlets and people to talk to.