

Depression



*No matter
how depressed you are,
you can feel better.*



Most people experience some form of depression at some point in their lives. Depression can range from a minor problem to a major life-threatening illness.

If you have experienced five or more of the following symptoms nearly every day for more than two weeks, you may be suffering from depression:

- feeling sad, blue, tearful, hopeless or down
- showing little interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy (including sex)
- experiencing a change in appetite, causing a weight gain or loss
- sleeping much more or less than usual
- feeling restless or irritable
- feeling fatigued or a loss of energy
- having feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt
- having difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- feeling like life isn't worth living
- having thoughts of death or suicide

Self-care

Try some of the following self-care tips for the next two weeks. See if they help you feel better. If not, see the back of this handout for next steps.

Get moving.

Even if you are not “in the mood,” exercise is good for you. You will have more energy, lose tension, and feel better. Examples of exercise include walking, swimming, and bicycling. Work your way up to 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week.

Find joy again.

Believe it or not, pleasure is good for you. Think of things that you enjoy—big or small—and do them. It can be anything from listening to music you love to taking time to walk your dog. You may have to push yourself at first, but it will help you feel better.

Reach out.

Make contact with friends or family. Depression thrives on isolation. Meaningful contact with others can relieve your lonely feelings.

Check what you are eating.

You may have started using excessive amounts of sweets or unhealthy foods as a temporary “comfort” for your feelings. Switch to healthier snacks and eat regular-sized portions. Then refer to the other tips mentioned here to start feeling better.



Stop substance abuse.

Many people start abusing caffeine, alcohol, or illegal drugs as “medicine” for depressed feelings. But these chemicals can make things worse and interfere with pre-scribed medicines. Eliminate these substances to make room for a healthier diet and lifestyle.

What about herbs and supplements?

There is some research that shows the herb St. John’s wort may be effective for mild to moderate depression. However, St. John’s wort raises safety concerns. It is not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration and it can change the effectiveness of other medications being taken. If you are considering the use of St. John’s wort, be sure to discuss it with your doctor or other health care professional.

Be positive.

As you start these steps, tell yourself you are doing the right things to lighten your mood. Look for signs that your depression is lifting, such as resuming pleasurable activities or making efforts to connect with friends. Remind yourself daily of these positive trends.

What to do when self-care doesn’t work

No matter how depressed you are, you can feel better. Self-care may be enough to pull you out of a mild depression. For a more serious depression, professional help may be needed.

The good news is that medical treatment can relieve symptoms of depression. Treatment includes counseling, medication, and self-care.

Books

Self-Esteem, Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning, New Harbinger Publications Inc., 1992.

The Mind & Body Health Handbook (formerly titled *The Healthy Mind Healthy Body Handbook*), David Sobel and Robert Ornstein, DRx, 1998.

The Feeling Good Handbook, David Burns, Plume, 1999.

Hotlines

National Depressive/Manic Depressive Association
1-800-826-3632

National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Hotline
1-800-662-4357

National Institute of Mental Health
1-800-647-2642

Web sites

National Institute of Mental Health
nimh.nih.gov

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need additional information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used.