

Teen Depression: Info for Teens & Parents



Together
we can work
to keep
you healthy.



*Feeling moody and
irritable are not
just part of being
a teen.*

Does life seem a lot harder lately? Have you been feeling empty or worthless? It could be depression.

Everyone feels down at some point in their lives. Depression is different. It can range from a minor problem to a major life-threatening illness. Fortunately, effective treatments are available for teens who suffer from depression.

Risk factors for depression

There are several risk factors that may lead to depression, including:

- a family history of depression
- losing a parent or someone else close
- the break-up of a romantic relationship
- being injured or dealing with a chronic illness
- abuse or neglect
- fighting in your family
- dealing with lots of stress
- smoking cigarettes
- wondering if you are gay, lesbian, or bisexual
- traumatic events, such as experiencing a natural disaster, a car accident, or robbery

How do I know if I'm depressed?

Feeling upset or down now and then is normal, but depression is different. Here is a way to help you understand if you're depressed:

- Have you been feeling sad, anxious, or empty inside?
- Have you been losing interest in hobbies, sports, or social activities, where things just don't seem fun anymore?
- Have you been feeling increasingly irritable or angry?
- Have you been having trouble getting along with your family or friends?
- Has your appetite changed, causing you to have gained or lost weight?
- Has your energy level changed, causing you to be really tired, restless, or irritable?
- Have you been waking up very early in the morning, not able to go back to sleep?
- Have your sleep patterns changed, either sleeping a lot more, or a lot less?
- Have you been feeling really bad about yourself, or have you been really being hard on yourself lately?
- Have you been thinking a lot about death and dying?

If you've been feeling this way for two weeks or longer, you should know that help is available.

Info for Teens & Parents

Alcohol and other drugs

If you're depressed, you may also have problems with alcohol or other drugs. (Alcohol is a drug, too.) Sometimes the depression comes first and drugs are an attempt to feel better. Other times, the drinking or drug use comes first. This can actually be the cause of depression (or it can make it worse). Regardless of which comes first, if you're drinking alcohol or using other drugs and think you may be depressed, it is important to admit to yourself that you have both of these problems. Get treatment as soon as possible.

Treatment options

Depression can be successfully treated with therapy, medication, or a combination of both. With the right treatment, 80 percent of people who reach out for help get better. In fact, many people start to feel better in just a few weeks.

What teens can do

- Talk to a caring adult, like a teacher, counselor, priest, or rabbi, and tell him or her how you are feeling.
- Stay connected to family and friends, even though you might want to be alone a lot.
- Get professional help from a counselor, therapist, doctor, or other medical professional.
- Accept that depression is not your fault. Depression is a medical condition—not a lack of will-power.
- Take care of yourself. Make sure you're sleeping at least eight hours

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of the information or medical care you receive from your medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your physician or other medical professional.

a night, and eating three well-balanced meals a day. Make an effort to get some exercise, even if you don't really feel like it. Try expressing your feelings by talking with a friend or by writing (or drawing) in a journal. Plan to do something enjoyable each day. Try to remember when you have felt different.

What parents can do

- Talk with your teen and let him or her know that you care and want to help. Don't assume that a teen's moodiness is "just a phase." Try to look beyond disruptive behavior—it may be a cry for help.
- Have your teen screened for depression. You can get information from a school counselor, the child and adolescent psychiatry clinic, the teen clinic or health education center at Kaiser Permanente.
- Lock up medications that may be deadly, or don't keep them around at all.
- Remove all guns from the home—including hunting rifles.
- Discuss the dangers of alcohol and illegal drugs, explaining to teens that they are especially vulnerable to accidents and addiction.
- Keep track of the warning signs you observe so you can discuss them with your teen's doctor or therapist. Make a special note about when and how often symptoms occur.
- Coordinate with your teen's therapist. Discuss your questions and concerns about treatment.

Suicide

Thoughts of death or suicide are usually signs of severe depression. If you feel like you can't cope anymore, or that life isn't worth living, it's really important to get help. Suicidal feelings, thoughts, impulses, or behaviors should always be taken seriously. If you are thinking of hurting or killing yourself, contact someone you trust to help you, such as:

- a trusted friend
- a parent or trusted family member
- staff at the student health or counseling center
- a teacher, coach, or advisor

Another good option is to call a local suicide hotline, or the national suicide prevention hotline: 1-800-suicide (1-800-784-2433). You can also go to any nearby hospital emergency room or call 911.

Other resources

- Kaiser Permanente's Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Department
- Kaiser Permanente Healthphone: 1-800-33-ASK ME
- Alcohol and Drugs Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP
- 24 hour California Youth Crisis Hotline: 1-800-843-5200
- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry:
www.aacap.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics:
www.aap.org
- National Institute of Mental Health:
www.nimh.org
- *The Feeling Good Handbook*—Burns
- *More Than Moody: recognizing and treating adolescent depression*—Harold S. Koplewicz
- *Mind Over Mood*—Greenberger and Padesky
- *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*
- www.kaiserpermanente.org