

What is depression?

Depression is an illness that affects your body, mood, and thoughts. It's more than feeling "blue" or a little "down" for a few days.

Depression is sadness that won't go away and interferes with all aspects of everyday life including eating, sleeping, working, relationships, and how you think and feel about yourself. You can't simply "snap out of it." You're not lazy or a weak person for being depressed.

- **Depression is real and serious**—like diabetes, heart disease, and asthma.
- **You're not alone.** Every year, about 1 in 10 adult Americans gets depression (over 19 million people).
- **Depression affects many different groups of people.** It affects people of all ages, races, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Unfortunately, about 2/3 of those with depression don't seek help and continue to suffer.
- **Depression is treatable.** Help is available, and most people who seek treatment for depression start to feel better.
- **Depression can be hard to recognize.** People often fail to recognize that they are depressed because they don't know the common symptoms of depression.



Are you depressed?

Check off any symptoms you have had for two weeks or more:

- Do you feel sad most of the day, almost everyday?
- Have you lost interest in things you used to enjoy doing?
- Do you feel tired and "slowed down," or restless and unable to sit still?
- Do you have trouble sleeping or are you sleeping too much?
- Are you eating more or less than usual?
- Do you have trouble concentrating, remembering things, or making decisions?
- Do you feel worthless and/or guilty?
- Do you have headaches, stomach problems, or pains that don't seem to go away?
- Do you think about death a lot or sometimes think about how you want to kill yourself?

If you checked 5 or more of these questions, you may have clinical depression. Talk to your primary care physician or nurse practitioner to find out what's available to help you.

If you are thinking seriously about suicide or hurting yourself, get help right away. Call your Kaiser Permanente medical professional or go to a Health Plan hospital. If you think you cannot safely go to a Plan hospital, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital emergency room.

What if you're depressed?

Educate yourself

Kaiser Permanente offers classes to teach you more about depression and how it is treated. These classes are offered at no cost and no copayment to Kaiser Permanente members:

- **Depression Overview:** A one-session class covering important facts about depression, including the causes, symptoms, and treatment options. You'll learn about medication, its side effects, psychotherapy, and self-care. If you have mild to moderate depression, your next step may include attending the "Overcoming Depression" class series.
- **Overcoming Depression:** A multi-session class based on the latest research on skills for managing depression. You'll learn to recognize and change unhelpful thinking and behavior patterns that may play a role in your depression. You'll learn how to take better care of yourself to help improve your mood and feel better about yourself.

Health Education Centers: At your local Health Education Center, you can find more information on available classes. You can also pick up pamphlets, books, and videos on depression.

Kaiser Permanente Web site: Log on to www.kp.org and click on to the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button. Here, you'll learn more about depression, join a depression discussion group, or find out about depression classes in your area.

Get treatment

Depression is a real illness and should be taken seriously. Don't wait for it to go away. Take action, ask for help, and get treatment so you can start to feel better.

■ **Depression therapy groups** are available for individuals with more severe symptoms of depression. Therapy groups are led by staff from the Department of Psychiatry. They focus on treating symptoms of depression by helping you develop new ways of thinking and coping with day-to-day life. Depression therapy groups can also assist you in developing a plan for responding to future problems. Research studies show that depression therapy groups can help.

■ **Antidepressant medications** may be prescribed by your medical professional depending on the symptoms and severity of your depression.

You can call your local Psychiatry Department to make an appointment without a referral. You can also talk with your primary care physician or nurse practitioner about which treatment options are best for you. Remember that depression is common, treatable, and not your fault.



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 medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor.

Take care of yourself

Helping yourself is an important part of the overall treatment for depression. Remember to **S-P-E-A-K U-P:**

Schedule. Set regular times for sleeping, eating, personal hygiene, work, exercise, or other important activities.

Pleasant activities. Increase pleasurable activities by calling a friend, watching a favorite video, spending time in your garden, working on a hobby, playing with your pet, or doing anything you enjoy.

Exercise. Research suggests regular exercise may help lift your mood, reduce tension, and raise your energy level. Even just a little can help.

Avoid alcohol and drugs. Alcohol and drug use can make depression worse, disrupt your sleep, and interfere with antidepressant medications.

Kind thoughts. Have compassion for yourself. Avoid taking on too much or being hard on yourself.

Unwind. Take time to relax. Set aside a few minutes, several times a week to let go of your worries. You can learn deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or visualization to help.

Practice assertiveness. Speak up for what you need.

Regional Health Education

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Understanding and Managing Depression

