

Depression

Depression is a major medical illness. It is more than just feeling "down in the dumps" or "blue" for a few days.

It is feeling "down" and "low" and "hopeless" for weeks at a time.

- Everyone occasionally feels blue or sad, but these feelings usually pass within a couple of days.
- When a person has a Depressive disorder, it interferes with daily life, normal functioning, and causes distress for both the person with the disorder and those who care about him.
- Depression is a common but serious illness, needing urgent treatment to get better.

❖ Types of Depressive Disorders:

- **Major Depressive Disorder:** Some of the symptoms include
 - Inability to enjoy pleasurable activities
 - Low mood for more than a week
 - Disturbed sleep and appetite
 - Low energy levels
 - Lack of motivation and interest
 - Ideas of hopelessness, helplessness and guilt
- **Psychotic Depression:** Occasionally patients suffering from moderate to severe depressive disorder can lose touch with reality. They might suffer from delusions or hallucinations. Patients might believe that they are evil and/or cursed. They might also hear voices reprimanding them. About 13- 15% of patients suffering from depression end up committing suicide. Depression is a major preventable cause for death.
- **Postpartum Depression:** This is diagnosed if a new mother develops a major depressive episode within 6 weeks of child birth. This is significantly different from mild sadness (blues) experienced by mothers after childbirth. Post partum depression needs active intervention in the form of medication and psychotherapy.

- **Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD):** This is characterized by the onset of a depressive illness during the winter months, when there is less natural sunlight. The depression generally lifts during spring and summer.
- **Dysthymia:** Some patients continue to experience low level of symptoms of depression for more than 2 years and these patients need intervention like any other patients though the symptoms might not be as severe as major depressive episode.

❖ Symptoms

All People with depressive illnesses do not experience the same symptoms. But some of the common symptoms experienced may include:

- Persistent sad, anxious feelings, feelings of hopelessness, pessimism,
 - Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, irritability, restlessness,
 - Loss of interest in activities or hobbies including sex,
 - Fatigue and decreased energy,
 - Difficulty concentrating, remembering details and making decisions,
 - Insomnia, early-morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping,
 - Overeating, or appetite loss,
 - Thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts,
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- Persistent aches or pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems that do not ease even with treatment.

❖ Treatment

- Treatment for depression is multimodal. One has to approach the illness from Biological, psychological and social perspectives.
- Medication forms a major part of treatment of moderate to severe depression. There are various classes of antidepressants which are effective.
- Most medicines take about 1-2 weeks to be effective.
- Your doctor might suggest you to take medicines for 6 months or longer depending on the nature and severity of the illness.



- Be aware of the side effects of the medication you are taking and do not stop medication without consulting your psychiatrist. Should you become pregnant or breast feeding, your doctor may review your medication.
- Please keep your doctor informed of any major problems you encounter while on medication and if you are taking any other medication such as oral contraceptive pill (OCP)

Psychological treatments: There are various forms of psychotherapy such as cognitive behavior therapy, brief dynamic therapy, psychoanalytical psychotherapy etc.

Cognitive behavior therapy has the most peer reviewed evidence as effective treatment.

Social Interventions: Patients benefit from a supportive environment. They can if possible be removed from any stressful situation.

- Yoga, Pranayama, walking will aid early recovery.
- Being in the presence of supportive family members, removal of existing stressors can aid in early recovery.

