

Overcoming depression

Some may believe that depression is just an intense form of sadness. The assumption is that eventually you'll get over it.

But sadness that lasts for weeks and interferes with daily activities isn't simply being sad. It could be depression.

Depression is a medical illness. And it can be treated successfully 80 to 90 percent of the time, the National Alliance on Mental Illness reports.

Reasons for depression Depression can be due to changes in body chemistry that influence your mood and thoughts. Hormonal changes may make women more likely than men to experience depression.

Certain health problems can bring on depression—including long-term illnesses, such as heart disease or cancer; chronic stress; medicine side effects; and drug or alcohol abuse.

So can important life events, such as divorce, financial difficulties,

or the death of a loved one.

Or a tendency for depression may be inherited.

Signs of a problem According to Mental Health America and other experts, a person with five or more of the following symptoms for two weeks in a row is medically depressed:

- Feels sad; cries a lot.
- Loses pleasure in activities once enjoyed, including sexual activity.
- Eats too little or too much.
- Has difficulty sleeping or sleeps a lot.
- Appears agitated.
- Is always tired.
- Feels hopeless, worthless, or guilty.
- Has problems thinking or concentrating.
- Has repeated thoughts of death or suicide.

Treatment can help Depression is a signal to see a doctor. It can't be willed or wished away. But with treatment, depression often goes away over time.

Medications or counseling—or both—can help, given sufficient time.

Antidepressants often take two to four weeks to start having an effect. They can take 6 to 12 weeks to be fully effective. A doctor can address any problems with side effects or change medication if needed.

Psychotherapy can be useful for mild to moderate depression. One therapy teaches how to change behavioral patterns that contribute to

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depressive illness. Another focuses on improving troubled relationships and on adapting to new life roles that may have contributed to depression.

Severe depression may require both psychotherapy and medication.

For more information, visit the American Psychological Association website at apa.org.

