



# Better days ahead.

## DEPRESSION

Depression is a real medical condition that can be caused by many factors. The good news is that it's treatable. With patience and the help of your doctor, you can manage your depression and live a happier, healthier life.

### > Who is at risk for depression?

Depression is more common than many people realize. Often, people who become depressed don't get help because they are ashamed or uncomfortable talking about it. If you think a loved one may be depressed, make sure he or she understands that it's not a sign of weakness. It's a medical condition that can be treated by a doctor.

If you have a family history of depression, you're more likely to experience it yourself. A major change, like the death of a loved one, loss of a job, or family issues can bring on depression.

Medical conditions like a stroke, a heart attack, or cancer can also trigger depression, but sometimes subtle changes like hormonal shifts related to pregnancy or even a woman's monthly cycle can also be an influence. Women are twice as likely to experience depression as men. Children and teenagers can also become depressed, so pay attention if your child seems to show the symptoms.

### > What are the symptoms of depression?

If you've experienced five or more of these signs nearly every day for two weeks or longer, talk to your doctor.

- Feeling like you don't want to go on living. **If you have thoughts about hurting yourself, call your doctor immediately.**
- Feeling like activities you used to enjoy are pointless or not worth the effort.
- Feeling sad, hopeless, or easily angered.

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- Feeling unfocused, as though your thinking is fuzzy and you can't concentrate or make decisions.
- Feeling worthless or guilty.
- A change in your sleep patterns, whether it's sleeping too much or not sleeping enough.
- A change in your appetite or rapid weight gain or loss with no explanation.
- Feeling restless or unable to settle down.
- A loss of energy that makes you feel too tired for ordinary activities like going to work.

### > What treatments are available?

Many people who have depression improve when they receive appropriate treatment. Your doctor may suggest medication, therapy, or a combination of the two. No depression treatment works instantly. Watch for gradual improvements and don't push yourself too much.

- **Antidepressants.** Your doctor may want to prescribe an antidepressant for you. This type of medication can help balance your body chemistry and relieve the physical cause of depression. Your doctor may want you to try a few different antidepressants to find the one that works best with your unique body chemistry.

Antidepressants may not work right away. Most people start to feel better just a few weeks after starting antidepressants, but in some cases it may take a few months to get the full results. Do not stop taking your medication if you start to feel better. Your doctor will want to take you off your medication slowly and gradually, and only when your body is ready for it.

- **Therapy.** Talking to a therapist or counselor can help you understand the root of your depression. Your therapist can help you look at and change negative thought patterns. A counselor can also work with you to design a plan to help manage your depression.

### > How can you help manage your depression?

In addition to medication or counseling, you can do a lot on your own to start feeling better.

- **Stay social.** Spend time with friends who make you laugh and feel good about yourself. Talking about your experience with a support group can also help.
- **Schedule some fun.** Even though it can be hard to get out there at first, getting back to the activities you used to love can improve your mood. Give some a try even if you think you may not be up to it at first.
- **Stay mindful and positive.** Break your negative thought patterns by replacing those thoughts with positive statements.
- **Try some stress-busters.** Taking a little time to manage your stress each day can do you a world of good. You might try meditation, drawing, or listening to music. Even just making sure you get eight hours of sleep at night can help you feel better.
- **Get moving.** Just half an hour of light exercise every day can help you feel more energetic, boost your mood, and reduce stress.
- **Stay away from alcohol and drugs.** Self-medicating in this way can often make depression worse.
- **Eat healthy.** Nurture and nourish yourself.

### > To learn more

For more information about the symptoms and treatment of depression, visit [kp.org/depression](http://kp.org/depression).

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1802-01056-01-r99 April 2009