

# Depression

## What is it?

Clinical or major *depression* is a persistent feeling of sadness that interferes with your ability to complete daily activities.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of depression include:

- Sad, irritable, or indifferent mood for most of the day, lasting more than 2 weeks
- Loss of pleasure and interest in most activities; tiredness
- Nervousness or sluggishness; difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, or helplessness
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Frequent negative thoughts that may include death or suicide

If you experience thoughts of suicide or hurting yourself or others, tell someone—a family member, friend, your doctor, or nurse—immediately.

## How is it diagnosed?

Depression is diagnosed based on your symptoms and how long you've had them.

## How is it treated?

Depression is very treatable with a combination of counseling and antidepressant medication.

**Medication:** There are numerous drugs available for depression. Most take 3 to 6 weeks to begin working. Medications include:

- **Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI).** These include Prozac® (fluoxetine), Zoloft® (sertraline), Paxil® (paroxetine), Lexapro® (escitalopram), and Celexa® (citalopram). They work by increasing levels of *serotonin* in your brain.
- **Mixed reuptake inhibitors.** These are Wellbutrin® and Zyban® (bupropion) and Effexor® (venlafaxine). Bupropion tends to have very few side effects, while venlafaxine may include nausea, headaches, and sexual side effects. Cymbalta® (duloxetine) is another common medication.
- **Tricyclic antidepressants.** These include Elavil® (amitriptyline) and Tofranil® (imipramine). Common side effects include increased heart rate, blurred vision, drowsiness, sexual problems, dizziness, bladder problems, and dry mouth.
- **Norepinephrine and 5-HT modulator.** Remeron® (mirtazapine). Side effects include weight gain and drowsiness.
- **Oncology counseling or problem-oriented talk therapy.** Counseling designed to help patients and their families manage the problems and strong feelings associated with chronic illness.



TIPS

## Tips to Help

In addition to talking with a therapist or counselor, and/or taking medication for your depression, the following may also help:

- **Get enough sleep and exercise daily.** Being well rested helps you mentally cope, while exercise increases the release of feel-good chemicals called endorphins.
- **Wake up and get up at the same time every day.**
- **Participate in a cancer support group,** which studies find can help with cancer-related depression. You can find one through your doctor's office or the local chapter of the American Cancer Society.
- **Practice relaxation techniques,** such as meditation, yoga, and deep breathing.
- Talk about your cancer fears with your doctor.

## Words to Know

**Depression:** A sad or indifferent feeling that interferes with your ability to complete your usual daily activities.

**Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI):** The most common class of antidepressants. They work by increasing levels of serotonin.

**Serotonin:** A brain chemical linked to depression.