



This sheet gives you information about the condition known as depression.

Key points

- Depression is a condition that can make you feel sad and hopeless.
- Anyone can experience depression, but some people are more at risk.
- There are ways to cope with depression and to treat it, through medication and/or self-care.

What is depression?

Depression is when you feel really sad, hopeless or just not like yourself for a long time. It can make things you used to enjoy feel hard to do. Depression can feel even heavier for kids, teens and families dealing with complex medical conditions. This is especially true when dealing with tough times like ongoing health issues.

It's important to remember that depression isn't a sign of weakness. It's a real medical condition that can affect how you feel, think and act.

What are some signs of depression?



Feeling sad or hopeless
most of the time



Losing interest in things
you used to love (like
hobbies, school or friends)



Changes in sleep or eating — like sleeping too
much, not enough or losing
interest in food



Feeling tired all the time
or not having energy to
do anything



Trouble concentrating —
finding it hard to focus on
tasks or schoolwork



**Withdrawing from friends
or family** — you may feel
like being alone more
than usual



Feeling nervous or shaky
sometimes, even if nothing
stressful is happening



**Thoughts of harming
yourself** — if this happens,
you must tell someone right
away, like a parent,
counselor or doctor

Who is at risk for depression?

There are many things that can make the chance of developing depression more likely. This is especially true when you're dealing with complex medical conditions. You may be at a higher risk of depression if you:

- Have had depression in the past
- Have a close family member with depression
- Struggle with uncontrolled pain
- Regularly feel weakness because of a chronic medical condition
- Have high levels of worry or anxiety
- Lack support from family or friends while dealing with a chronic medical condition
- Have financial concerns
- Are taking medications that can contribute to depression

All of these things can make you more at risk of depression. But anyone can experience it, no matter their background or situation.

What can I do to manage sadness and/or depression?

Get professional support

- Think about trying counseling or therapy to address your emotional well-being and to learn coping strategies for managing depression.
- Connect with mental health professionals like a social worker, counselor or therapist experienced in working with people dealing with medical complexities to provide specialized support.

Join support groups

- Look for patient support groups where you can share experiences, get emotional support from people going through similar challenges and feel understood.
- Join peer-to-peer support programs that connect you with other people who have dealt with a complex medical condition and can share valuable insights and encouragement.
- Confide in trusted friends, relatives or a chaplain/spiritual advisor who can offer understanding and support.

Explore medication options

- Medication may help if your depression feels overwhelming or affects your daily life in a serious way.
- Ask your healthcare provider or psychiatrist if medication is the right plan for you.

- Prescription medications for depression can take 3-6 weeks to work. Some trial and error may be needed to find the right medication for you.
- It's important to combine medication with counseling (talk therapy) for the best results.
- Tell your healthcare provider about any vitamins or herbal supplements you're taking. Some of these may not mix safely with anti-depression drugs.

Educate yourself about your diagnosis

- Decide how much medical information you're comfortable learning. You can then talk about your treatment options, expected outcomes, side effects and support services with your care team. Some people feel less worried when they know what to expect about their illness and treatment.
- Think about bringing a trusted friend or family member to medical appointments to provide support, help ask questions and take notes. You can ask your healthcare provider if you can record your conversations with them so you can go back and listen to them later.
- Get reliable information from trusted sources, such as organizations, medical professionals and support resources provided by healthcare institutions.

Practice self-care

- Try relaxation techniques like deep breathing, meditation, yoga or other integrative therapies (like acupuncture, massage and/or Reiki) to cut down on symptoms and help with your overall well-being.
- Eat a balanced and nutritious diet to support your physical and mental health.
- Prioritize tasks and activities that bring you joy and a sense of purpose. Work on learning to delegate or say "no" to less important demands.
- Think about talking with a chaplain or spiritual advisor if you find comfort in discussing your spiritual beliefs or concerns.
- Practice self-compassion and avoid self-blame or guilt about your diagnosis or any depressive symptoms.
- Allow yourself time to rest, reflect and engage in activities that bring you comfort and joy.
- Focus on the present moment and practice mindfulness to worry less about the future.
- Remember that you don't have to face your worries alone.

Please note that this information is provided for educational purposes only and should not replace medical care or the advice of your doctor.