

DEPRESSION

HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M DEPRESSED OR IF I'M JUST HAVING A BAD DAY?

Everyone has bad days. It's perfectly normal to feel low when you break up with your boyfriend/girlfriend or fail an exam. However, if your sad mood persists over a longer period of time and starts affecting your daily routine, you may be clinically depressed. If you think you or a friend may be clinically depressed, it's a good idea to make an appointment with your school health clinic or counselling services office to get help.

10 SIGNS OF DEPRESSION:

1. More emotional than usual – prolonged tearful and lonely feelings.
2. Feeling of worthlessness – harsh self-judgment, blaming yourself.
3. Changes in sleeping patterns – sleeping too little or too much.
4. Appetite or weight changes – no appetite or eating more than usual.
5. No energy – very tired or lazy feeling.
6. Unable to concentrate – everything seems hazy; you just can't focus and make decisions.
7. Loss of interest – can't be bothered, bored very easily.
8. Negative attitude – very hard to be optimistic.
9. Feelings of helplessness – just feeling like you have bad luck and things will never get better.
10. Thinking about suicide or hurting yourself – at this point, seek help immediately.

WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION?

The causes are different for everyone and very complex. Some common causes include:

GENETICS – Depression and anxiety tend to run in families.

TRAUMA AND STRESS – Stresses such as a relationship breakup, death of a loved one can bring about depression.

ILLNESS – Some medical conditions can contribute to depression as well as some medications.

HOW IS DEPRESSION TREATED?

Depression is very treatable with a combination of medication and counselling. Doing one without the other is not as helpful.

Counselling can help you to:

- Learn strategies to cope with stress and anxiety.
- Deal with grief and trauma or other stresses.
- Plan your life and control feelings and thoughts that contribute to your depression.
- Learn to control your negative internal voice.

TIPS TO HELP FIGHT DEPRESSIVE FEELINGS:

1. **GO OUTSIDE** – Staying inside can drain a person; just getting out and enjoying the sun may lift anyone’s spirits.
2. **EXERCISE** – Force yourself into some daily physical activity.
3. **BE SOCIAL** – Get out there! Don’t isolate and feel sorry for yourself. Even if you’re not in the mood, you may surprise yourself by how much fun you will have.
4. **STOP THINKING SO MUCH** – Too much overanalyzing and obsessing will lead to exaggerated feelings and drag you down.
5. **TALK** – Don’t bottle up your feelings. Talk to people you can trust who will understand what you are going through.
6. **RELAX** – Take time for yourself. Consider trying yoga or meditation.
7. **EAT HEALTHY** – Eating a well-rounded balanced meal gives your body the fuel it needs to combat stress. Don’t skip meals and stay away from junk food.
8. **STAY AWAY FROM BOOZE AND DRUGS** – Alcohol and drugs are depressants and may contribute to your depressive feelings.
9. **LAUGH** – Rent a funny DVD and watch it.
10. **PROBLEM SOLVE** – Take control and plan out solutions to your problems instead of feeling hopeless. Ask others for advice.
11. **STRUCTURE YOUR DAY** – Give yourself some tasks to do. This helps keep you busy and your mind active.

If these tips don’t help your depressive feelings DO NOT tell yourself it’s hopeless; you have not failed! Talk to a counsellor and perhaps consider seeing a doctor who may prescribe medication. You do not need to endure painful loneliness. Take advantage of the resources in your community; that’s what they are there for!

TIPS FOR HELPING OTHERS

Accepting and coping with someone who is depressed is not easy!

Here are a few pointers to help you better understand and be there for someone you care about:

1. **Don't blame yourself** – *For starters, you must know it's not your fault that this person is depressed; no one can "make" another person depressed.*
2. **Put yourself first** – *You need to realize you can't help others as well as you could if you're stressed out. It's perfectly understandable to take time away from the depressed person to take care of yourself and lessen your tensions before you can help them.*
3. **Don't try to change them** – *You don't have to solve another's friend's problems or depression. Just be there and accept them without passing judgment and constantly trying to fix them.*
4. **Listen** – *When you listen and acknowledge your friend's feelings they will feel you care and are there to support them.*
5. **Get them out** – *Try to bring the depressed person out to have some fun and encourage them to try new things.*
6. **Be positive** – *If you're in a good mood don't let someone else drag you down; the best influence is a positive one. Keep positive and you may rub off on them.*

 **Check this out:**

<http://www.cmha.ca>

~~ Learn from Susan's story ~~

Pretty much my whole life I felt like something was missing. I always asked my parents to move, because I figured maybe I'd be happier somewhere else. But that never happened. I couldn't quite put my finger on what it was that was missing in my life or inside me. I had a lot of good friends and was pretty much a class clown. But inside I was secretly unhappy. I tried to fill the emptiness in my heart with drugs and alcohol. I would also get comfort from men - who would make me feel good about myself. Unfortunately however, they were all the wrong kinds of men. Anyway, I started to skip class more often and my grades declined, but I didn't even care. I never cared to eat healthy; in fact, some days I'd just have a bag of chips, because I never had much of an appetite. I would just go out partying every night so I could forget everything and just be happy, even if it was just for the night. But every day I'd wake up miserable, so I'd just sleep as long as possible. Some days I wouldn't even get out of bed.

What changed the situation?

After barely graduating from high school, I went on to take a full-time job as a retail clerk and I moved out on my own. However, I had a really hard time paying the bills. So I got another job - but when I would go into work hungover or tired from a night of partying, it made for a really hard time trying to get the work done. So I'd call in sick all the time. Anyway - long story short, I got fired from BOTH jobs! I couldn't pay the bills and I wondered why I was such a slacker. I ended up going on unemployment insurance for a few months. I couldn't even afford to party anymore. That's when it occurred to me - there had to be something better out there. I was determined not to keep falling down the wrong path. So I went to see my family doctor, who put me on antidepressants and recommended a good career counsellor. The career counsellor helped me find out what my interests are and set me up with some courses to upgrade my skills, I ended up getting my first job that I actually cared about. Sure it was just a receptionist position, but it was for a radio station I loved so I knew it would be fun. Plus it had lots of opportunity for growth. It was just the step I needed in the right direction. Now I'm surrounded by career-driven positive people and it's the best environment ever. I love my life!

My advice to someone with depressive feelings:

There is help out there. You have to look within and know that you can do anything. Don't settle for less. If something feels missing, don't fill the emptiness with drugs, alcohol or whatever. Figure out what is missing. There are lots of counsellors who can help you with that. You will find your way - just don't give up. Don't forget to surround yourself with positive people.