

# Don't Settle for Sadness: Talk to Your Doctor

## What Is Depression?

Depression is a health condition that can affect both your mind and your body. It can impact your emotions and mood, ability to function and do daily activities, relationships, and quality of life. Symptoms of depression often include feeling sad, anxious, worried, or hopeless. You may also have less interest in doing things you normally enjoy, feel more easily irritated or frustrated, and have physical problems, like headaches, backaches, or stomach aches.

Depression can be different for different people, both in its cause and the effects it can have. For some people, stressful life events can cause depression. But for others, it may be due to chemical changes in the brain.



## Getting Treatment

The first step is to let your doctor know how you're feeling. Having open and honest communication about your symptoms is important. They may refer you to a specialist to help diagnose, or identify, if you have depression so you can get the care and treatment that best fits your individual needs. Treatments your doctor may recommend, alone or in combination, can include lifestyle changes, medicine, and counseling (therapy). But treatment for depression is not one size fits all and different treatments can work differently for different people.

It may be hard, but it's important to be patient and stick to your treatment plan. Take all medicines as directed, talk to your doctor regularly, and be sure to keep your appointments. Tell your doctor about any symptoms you have or side effects from medicine -- together you can find ways to manage them. And don't stop or change any treatment without talking to your doctor first, as this may cause symptoms to get worse. Keeping a journal or diary to track your symptoms and any side effects can be helpful for when you talk to your doctor.

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## Treatment-Resistant Depression

Some people may still have symptoms, or symptoms that get better then come back, even after trying several treatments. This is called treatment-resistant depression and can happen for many different reasons with symptoms that can range from mild to severe. You and your doctor may need to try a number of different treatment types to see what works for you, such as:

- **Medicine strategies**, such as your doctor giving your current medicine more time to work, changing your dose, switching you to a different medicine, or adding another medicine
- **Testing to check for genes** (traits you inherit from your parents) that may determine how well certain medicines may work for you
- **Different types of counseling or therapy**, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) that teaches you skills to take on challenges in a positive way, family therapy with your spouse and/or others, and group therapy
- **Procedures**, such as electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), vagus nerve stimulation (VNS), transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), or medicine given into a vein (intravenously or IV) or nasally by a doctor or healthcare team member

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle can also help manage your depression. Ways to do this include:

- Stay active and get regular exercise
- Get enough sleep (7 to 8 hours a night)
- Maintain a healthy weight and eat a healthy diet
- Avoid alcohol and don't use drugs
- Find ways to manage stress



### Questions you can ask your doctor about managing depression can include:

What symptoms should I look for?

What treatments are available, and what are their side effects?

Are there any lifestyle changes I should make?

Are there options for appointments if I can't visit in person?

Is there a support group I can join?

Where can I find more information and resources?