

Treatment options

All forms of depression are serious if they affect your ability to function. Careful attention to determining the source of inner conflict, strained emotions, and behavioral changes is critical for addressing the development of depression and highlighting treatment options.

There is no sure way to prevent any disorder. People inherit tendencies toward certain disorders, and if depression runs in your family, you are a more likely candidate. However, there are steps you can take that make depression less likely. The most helpful thing to do is reduce stress. Fortunately, factors that increase happiness also tend to reduce stress. Happy people tend to have:

- High self-esteem. Remember that you are created in God's image
- Optimism. Change your thinking to see the good in situations.
- Close friendships (and satisfying relationships). You are part of the body of Christ
- Meaningful faith and work. You are a part of God's plan for the redemption of the world.
- Adequate sleep and exercise. Although this practice seems unrelated, not taking care of yourself physically can lead to depression.
- Enjoyable activities. Regularly do "fun" things.

If these initial steps do not provide relief from the pain, other options are available. Consider speaking with a friend, partner, minister, professional counselor, or psychiatrist to canvass a different perspective. In addition to therapy options, there are medicinal treatments that target depression with noted effectiveness.

If you need assistance in managing depression, you may want to consult with a professional counselor in your geographical area. Although depression is common, you can take steps to prevent it and recover from it.

Sometimes scriptures can bring comfort during stormy times. John 14:27 says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (New International Version).

If you are in doubt about where to turn for assistance, please feel free to call the Regent University Psychological Services Center at (757) 352-4488.



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Help for Depression



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Major depression is one of the most debilitating illnesses affecting Americans today. It can affect your ability to function, think, and feel. More specifically, it is a mood problem noted by pervasive sadness, disappointment, and hopelessness. The depressed person usually has difficulty finding pleasure in life, has feelings of intense loneliness, and has limited energy to engage in life activities. Most people have periods when they feel discouraged about their circumstances. However, true depression goes deeper by lasting longer and impacting one's whole existence.

People dealing with depression often wish for a better day, but have lost hope that it will come. They do not know how to 'feel' better. Those suffering from depression may experience extreme mood fluctuations or a desire to withdraw from interactions with others. Frustrated with the inability to snap out of it, they become more discouraged. In some cases, depression can last for extended periods of time – months or even years. One way to deal with depression is to determine the severity of the experience, understand the influences that prompted its onset, and securing treatment options.

Christians sometimes deny that they feel depressed. Even God's choice people thousands of years ago felt depressed sometimes. Of course, there is no way we can go back and ask people in the Bible whether or not they have all of the symptoms, but let's look at some things they said about themselves.

- David (king): "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart... My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction" (Psalm 13:2; 31:10 NIV).
- Job (layman): "Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? ...I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil" (Job 3:11, 26 NIV).
- Elijah (prophet): "I have had enough, Lord. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors (1 Kings 19:4 NIV).
- Jonah (missionary): "O, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:3 NIV).

Symptoms

Depression can impact a person's life in many different ways. To a large degree, the manifestation of depression depends on the person's coping style, personality, and previous level of functioning. Following are some symptoms of depression. Review the areas and determine how you compare with the descriptors.

Emotions:

- Blunted emotional presentation or frequent crying spells
- Difficulty in finding pleasure in life activities
- Decreased sexual desire
- Profound feelings of guilt or shame
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- Cold or distant feelings toward family or friends

Behavior:

- Decreased interest in participating in activities previously enjoyed
- Diminished interest in maintaining one's hygiene
- Neglecting responsibilities
- Reduced coping ability
- Impaired communication with others (e.g., irritating, sarcastic)

Physical Complaints:

- Lack of energy
- Compulsive eating or loss of appetite
- Headaches, backaches, or general muscle aches without a specific cause
- Gastrointestinal problems (e.g., stomach pain, nausea, change in bowel habits)
- Insomnia or excessive sleeping

If you have several of these symptoms, you may be seriously depressed. Consulting with a professional counselor may be helpful as you determine a way to handle the problem. One step in this process is to understand the various causes of depression.

What causes this problem?

Depression can be prompted by a variety of factors. Some episodes of depression are situation-induced. For example, the death of a loved one, the loss of one's job, or the disappointment of failed efforts can all initiate an episode of depression. When someone can discern the source of depression, the outlook is more favorable. Specific measures can be incorporated to deal with the pain. However, when no source is clear, the depression may worsen due to lack of treatment.

In addition to situational factors, there are other stressors that prompt depression. Chemical imbalances, personality factors, drug and alcohol use, physical illness, and inadequate dietary practices can influence the onset of depression. Given that so many influences can impact one's mental health, it is important to monitor one's lifestyle and health practices.