

Common Questions About Depression

What is depression? Depression is more than the blues or the blahs. When that “down” mood, along with other symptoms, lasts for more than a couple of weeks, the condition may be clinical depression. Depression is a serious health problem that affects the total person. In addition to feelings, it can change behavior, physical health and appearance, academic performance, social activity, and the ability to handle everyday decisions and pressures.

What causes depression? We don’t know all the causes of depression, but there seem to be biological and emotional factors that may increase the likelihood that someone will develop a depressive disorder. Research suggests a genetic link to depressive disorders; depression can run in families. Difficult life experiences and certain personal patterns, such as difficulty handling stress, low self-esteem, or extreme pessimism about the future, can increase the chances of becoming depressed.

How common is depression and is it serious? Depression is a lot more common than most people think, and it affects people of all ages and from different backgrounds. This year it will affect around 15 million Americans, so if you are experiencing symptoms of depression, you are not alone. It’s important to take depression seriously because it can disrupt your ability to function in daily life leading to big problems like trouble in school, alcohol and drug use, and feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness. Suicide is often linked to depression.

Are all depressive disorders alike? There are various forms of depression. Some people experience only one episode of depression in their life, but many have several recurrences. Some depressive episodes begin suddenly for no apparent reason, while others can be associated with a life situation or stress. Sometimes people who are depressed cannot perform even the simplest daily activities – like getting out of bed or getting dressed; others go through the motions, but it is clear they are not acting or thinking as usual.

Can it be treated? Yes, depression is treatable. People with depression – even the most serious forms – can be helped. There are a variety of psychotherapies and medications that can be used to treat depressive disorders. Some people do well with therapy alone while others do best with combined treatments: medication to gain relatively quick symptom relief and psychotherapy to learn effective ways to deal with life’s problems, including depression.

The most important step toward overcoming depression – and sometimes the most difficult – is asking for help. If you are experiencing signs of depression, or worried about a friend, ACT: Acknowledge, Care, Tell.

Help is always available. Text “Hello” to 741741 or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 for 24/7 free and confidential support.