



## DEPRESSION

Everyone experiences unhappiness and many people may become depressed temporarily. These feelings are normal and relatively short lived. This is not the case with depressive illness. Depression affects 12-18% of the population.

### Definition

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Depression is a normal human emotion; however depression as an illness is a more serious condition. When a depressed state persists for several weeks, deepens, and starts interfering with work and everyday life, it becomes an illness. Depression brings about changes in a person's mood, behaviour and thinking.

### Common Symptoms

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Some common signs to look for are:

- Feelings of sadness or irritability
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Changes in weight or appetite
- Changes in sleeping pattern
- Feelings of guilt, hopelessness or worthlessness
- Inability to concentrate
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Restlessness or decreased activity
- Complaints of physical aches and pains
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Alcohol or drug abuse

### Causes of Depression

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The causes of depression are varied. They may include:

- Specific, distressing life events
- Biochemical imbalance in the brain
- Inherited disposition
- Living with a depressed person
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Medical conditions

## **Treatment**

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Depression is the most treatable of all mental illnesses; four of five people with depression can be successfully treated.

Effective treatment often involves medication and/or psychotherapy and depends on:

- The person's optimism, hope and energy
- The number and types of stressors present
- The severity of symptoms
- How long the person has been depressed
- The results of previous treatment
- The support of family, friends and significant others

## **How to Help**


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- Treat the person as an adult
- Emphasize the positive
- Acknowledge effort
- Use humour
- State clear expectations
- Deal with problems as they arise
- Don't lose hope
- Recognize that stigma exists
- Learn more about depression and its treatment

## **Where To Go For Help**

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- Family and friends
- General practitioners
- Self-help groups
- Counsellor
- Psychiatrist
- Social worker or psychologist
- Distress or crisis lines

Funding provided by:   
United Way  
Alliance Capital Region