



Depression Overview

Clinical depression (also referred to as major depression or major depressive disorder) is a serious condition that affects millions of Americans every year. It is significantly different from the periods of sadness or feelings of grief that are expected parts of life for most people. It is normal to be sad or “down” occasionally and to experience grief when a significant loss occurs, but clinical depression has more severe symptoms, it often lasts for a long period of time and it is more likely to have an impact on a person’s ability to function normally.

Common Symptoms of a Major Depressive Episode

A formal diagnosis of major depression may be made when a person has experienced five or more of the following symptoms every day or almost every day during a two-week period, and at least one of the symptoms is depressed or irritable mood or loss of interest or pleasure in activities previously enjoyed.

- Depressed mood with overwhelming feelings of sadness and grief; and/or irritable mood
- Loss of interest and pleasure in activities formerly enjoyed
- Noticeable changes in appetite and weight
- Insomnia, early morning waking or oversleeping
- Restlessness or being physically slowed down
- Decreased energy, or fatigue
- Feelings of worthlessness, guilt or helplessness
- Difficulty concentrating or thinking; indecisiveness
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

Depressive episodes can also be part of other mood disorders, including bipolar disorder.

People with **bipolar I disorder** have manic episodes that last at least seven days, or manic symptoms that are so severe that immediate hospital care is needed. Usually, depressive episodes occur as well, typically lasting at least two weeks. Episodes of depression with mixed features (having depressive symptoms and manic symptoms at the same time) are also possible.

Bipolar II disorder is defined by a pattern of depressive episodes and hypomanic episodes, but not the full-blown manic episodes that are typical of bipolar I disorder.