

DEPRESSION

Depression symptoms can vary greatly because different people experience depression in different ways. A 25-year-old man with depression may not have the same symptoms as a 70-year-old man, for instance. For some people, depression symptoms are so severe that it's obvious something isn't right. Others may feel generally miserable or unhappy without really knowing why.

Symptoms of depression include:

- Loss of interest in normal daily activities
- Feeling sad or down
- Feeling hopeless
- Crying spells for no apparent reason
- Problems sleeping
- Trouble focusing or concentrating
- Difficulty making decisions
- Unintentional weight gain or loss
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Being easily annoyed
- Feeling fatigued or weak
- Feeling worthless
- Thoughts of suicide or suicidal behavior
- Unexplained physical problems, such as back pain or headaches

Diagnostic criteria for depression

There are several other conditions whose symptoms may include depression. It's important to get an accurate diagnosis so you can get the appropriate treatment. *Your doctor or mental health provider's evaluation will help determine if you have major depression or one of these other conditions that can sometimes resemble major depression:*

- Adjustment disorder. An adjustment disorder is a severe emotional reaction to a difficult event in your life. It's a type of stress-related mental illness that may affect your feelings, thoughts and behavior.
- Bipolar disorder. This type of depression is characterized by mood swings that range from highs to lows. It's sometimes difficult to distinguish between bipolar disorder and depression, but it's very important to get the right diagnosis so that you can get the proper treatment and medications.
- Cyclothymia. Cyclothymia, or cyclothymic disorder, is a milder form of bipolar disorder.
- Dysthymia. Dysthymia (dis-THI-me-uh) is a less severe but more chronic form of depression. While it's usually not disabling, dysthymia can prevent you from functioning normally in your daily routine and from living life to its fullest.
- Postpartum depression. This is depression that occurs in a new mother usually within a month of having a baby.
- Psychotic depression. This is severe depression accompanied by psychosis, such as delusions or hallucinations.
- Schizoaffective disorder. Schizoaffective disorder is a condition in which a person meets the criteria for both schizophrenia and a mood disorder.
- Seasonal affective disorder. This type of depression is related to changes in seasons and a lack of exposure to sunlight.

Major depression is distinguished from these other conditions by its symptoms and their severity. To be diagnosed with major depression, you must meet the symptom criteria spelled out in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). This manual is published by the American Psychiatric Association and is used by mental health providers to diagnose mental conditions and by insurance companies to reimburse for treatment.

Diagnostic criteria for depression include:

- Symptoms that occur nearly every day for two or more weeks
- A depressed mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in most activities
- Significant unintentional weight loss or weight gain
- Sleeping difficulties, whether sleeping too much, too little or frequent waking episodes while trying to sleep
- Feelings of restlessness and agitation
- Feelings of sluggishness
- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Problems thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Your symptoms cause you distress or impair your ability to function in your daily life

Make sure you understand what type of depression you have so that you can learn more about your specific situation and its treatments.