

Depression is more than just feeling sad or going through a rough patch. It's a serious mental health condition that requires understanding and medical care. Left untreated, depression can be devastating for the people who have it and for their families. Fortunately, with early detection, diagnosis and a treatment plan consisting of medication, psychotherapy and lifestyle choices, many people do get better.

Some people have only one episode in a lifetime, but for most people depression recurs. Without treatment, episodes may last a few months to several years.

An estimated 16 million American adults—almost 7% of the population—had at least one major depressive episode in the past year. People of all ages and all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds experience depression, but it does affect some groups of people more than others. Women are 70% more likely than men to experience depression, and young adults aged 18–25 are 60% more likely to have depression than people aged 50 or older.

Symptoms

Just like with any mental illness, people with depression experience symptoms differently. But for most people, depression changes how they function day-to-day. Common symptoms of depression include:

- Changes in sleep
- Changes in appetite
- Lack of concentration
- Loss of energy
- Lack of interest
- Low self esteem
- Hopelessness
- Changes in movement
- Physical aches and pains

Causes

Depression does not have a single cause. It can be triggered, or it may occur spontaneously without being associated with a life crisis, physical illness or other risk. Scientists believe several factors contribute to cause depression:

- **Trauma.** When people experience trauma at an early age, it can cause long-term changes in how their brains respond to fear and stress. These brain changes may explain why people who have a history of childhood trauma are more likely to experience depression.
- **Genetics.** Mood disorders and risk of suicide tend to run in families, but genetic inheritance is only one factor.
- **Life circumstances.** Marital status, financial standing and where a person lives have an effect on whether a person develops depression, but it can be a case of “the chicken or the egg.”

- **Brain structure.** Imaging studies have shown that the frontal lobe of the brain becomes less active when a person is depressed. Depression is also associated with changes in how the pituitary gland and hypothalamus respond to hormone stimulation.
- **Other medical conditions.** People who have a history of sleep disturbances, medical illness, chronic pain, anxiety, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are more likely to develop depression.
- **Drug and alcohol abuse.** Approximately 30% of people with substance abuse problems also have depression.

Diagnosis

To be diagnosed with depression, a person must have experienced a major depressive episode that has lasted longer than two weeks. The symptoms of a major depressive episode include:

- Loss of interest or loss of pleasure in all activities
- Change in appetite or weight
- Sleep disturbances
- Feeling agitated or feeling slowed down
- Fatigue
- Feelings of low self-worth, guilt or shortcomings
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Suicidal thoughts or intentions

Treatments

Although depression can be a devastating illness, it often responds to treatment. The key is to get a specific evaluation and a treatment plan. Treatment can include any one or combination of:

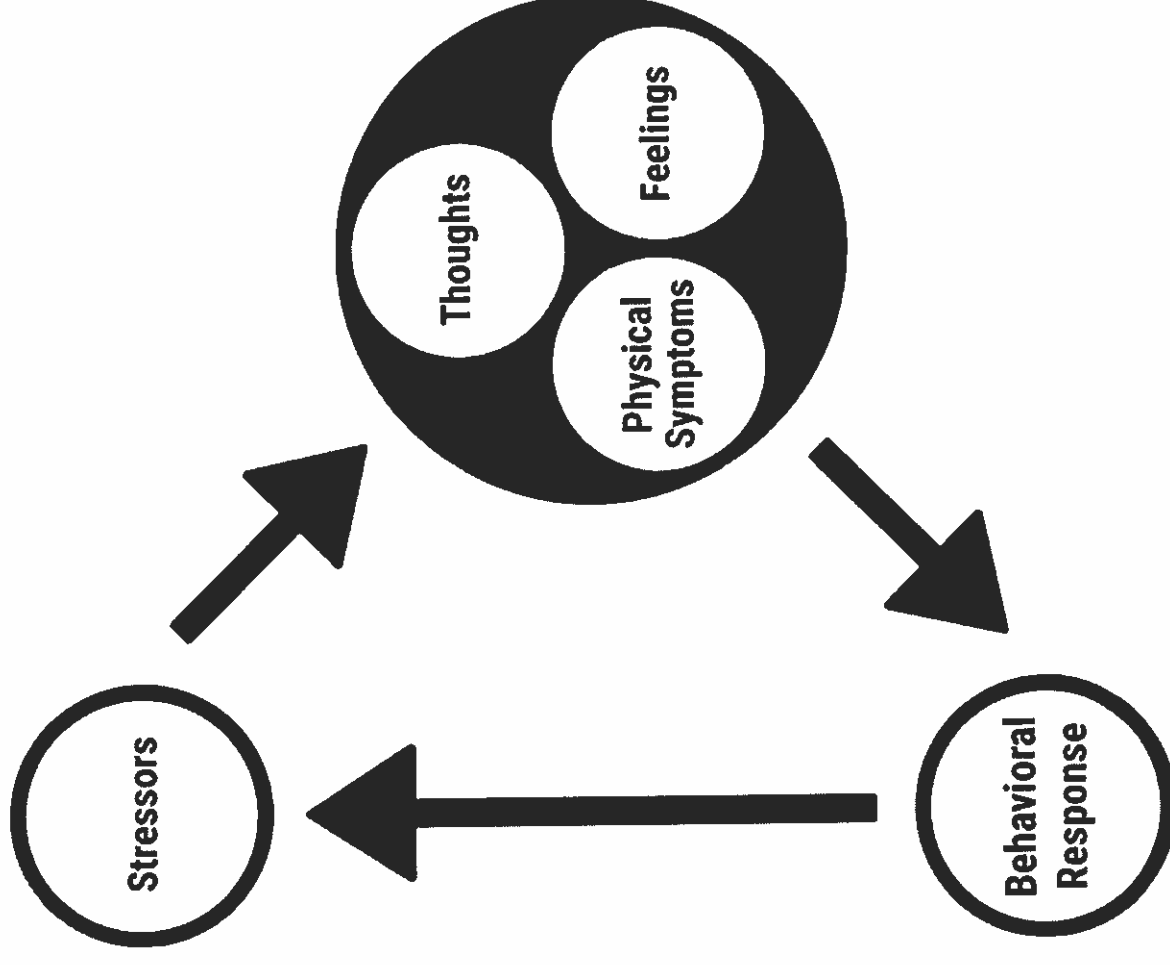
- **Medications** including antidepressants, mood stabilizers and antipsychotic medications
- **Psychotherapy** including cognitive behavioral therapy, family-focused therapy and interpersonal therapy
- **Brain stimulation therapies** including electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) or repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS)
- **Light therapy**, which uses a light box to expose a person to full spectrum light and regulate the hormone melatonin
- **Exercise**
- **Alternative therapies** including acupuncture, meditation, and nutrition
- **Self-management strategies and education**
- **Mind/body/spirit approaches** such as meditation, faith, and prayer

See more at: <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Depression>

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NAMI
3803 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 100
Arlington, VA 22203
www.nami.org
NAMI HelpLine: 800-950-NAMI (6264)
f NAMI | t namicomunicate

The Cycle of Depression



Stressors

A stressor is any situation that causes strain or hardship. These may be short-term or long-term.

Thoughts

Stressors often lead to negative thoughts, which may be irrational, or exaggerated.

- "I need to be perfect."
- "I'm not good at anything."
- "Nobody likes me."

Feelings

The way a person thinks about something has a major impact on how they will feel, and vice versa.

- sadness
- anger
- hopelessness
- loneliness

Physical Symptoms

The body responds to stressors, and negative thoughts and feelings, with physical symptoms.

- fatigue
- sleep problems
- poor concentration
- loss of motivation

Behavioral Response

The way a person acts in response to thoughts, feelings, and symptoms may worsen stressors, or create new stressors.

- social isolation
- neglecting daily tasks
- abusing drugs / alcohol

Coping Skills

Depression

Behavioral Activation

Depression saps a person's energy to do just about anything—even activities they enjoy. As a result, people with depression tend to become less active, which causes the depression to worsen. However, even a little bit of activity can help stop this cycle.

1. Choose activities you are likely to complete.

exercise	walk, go for a bike ride, weightlift, follow an exercise video, swim, practice yoga
socialize	call or text a friend, organize a group dinner, visit family, join a club / group
responsibilities	cleaning / housework, pay bills, professional development, homework
hobbies	sports, gardening, drawing, playing music, hiking, playing with a pet, cooking
personal care	dress up, get a haircut, prepare a healthy meal, tend to spiritual needs

2. Practice your chosen activities. Use the following tips to improve consistency.

start small	If needed, break activities into smaller pieces. Some activity is better than none.
make a plan	Set an alarm as a reminder, or tie an activity to something you already do. For example, practice a hobby immediately after dinner every day.
bring a friend	Including a friend will increase your commitment and make things more fun.

Social Support

Social isolation is a common symptom of depression. Related issues—such as fatigue, lowered self-esteem, and anxiety—exacerbate this problem. Resisting social isolation, and instead leaning on social support, can improve resilience to stress and depression.

- ✓ **Lean on your existing relationships.** Make it a priority to socialize with friends or family every day. If this is proving difficult, or if no one is nearby, plan times to interact remotely. Try cooking together on a video call, playing a game together, or sharing a coffee over the phone.
- ✓ **Say “yes” to socializing.** Depression makes it tempting to stay home, isolated from friends and family. Make a habit of saying “yes” to social opportunities, even when you’re tempted to stay in.
- ✓ **Join a support group.** Support groups let you connect with others who are dealing with issues similar to yours. You’ll benefit from sharing and receiving advice and support.

Coping Skills

Depression

Three Good Things

Negative thinking is a defining feature of depression. Positive experiences are minimized, while negative experiences are magnified. Gratitude helps combat this tendency by shifting focus toward *positive* experiences, rather than negative ones.

- 1 Write about three positive experiences from your day. These experiences can be small ("The weather was perfect when I walked to work") or big ("I got a promotion at work").

Choose one of the following questions to answer about each of the three good things:

- 2
 - Why did this happen?
 - Why was this good thing meaningful?
 - How can I experience more of this good thing?
- 3 Repeat this exercise every day for 1 week.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment. It means taking a step back and noticing the world, and one's thoughts and feelings, without judgment. The goal of mindfulness is to simply *observe*. Mindfulness helps reduce the rumination and worry that often accompany depression.

One way to practice mindfulness is through meditation. During mindfulness meditation, you will simply sit and focus your attention on the sensation of breathing. By focusing on your breathing, you will put yourself in the here-and-now.



Time and Place

Find a quiet, comfortable place where you can practice mindfulness for 15 to 30 minutes every day. Frequent and consistent practice leads to the best results, but some practice is better than none.



Posture

Sit in a chair or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes or let your gaze soften. Let your head, shoulders, arms, and legs relax. Adjust your posture whenever you feel uncomfortable.



Awareness of Breath

Focus on your breathing. Notice the sensation of the air as it travels in through your nose and out through your mouth. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your belly.



Wandering Mind

During meditation, it's normal for the mind to wander. When this happens, gently turn your attention back to your breathing. You may need to do this frequently throughout your practice.