

# Weekly Wellness Tip

## Depression Overview

About 10 percent of all Americans will suffer from depression at some point in their lives. Depression can occur at any age and can cause great pain for the people who have the condition and those who care about them. People who are depressed can usually get better with treatment. But most never seek help for their condition. Next week's wellness tip will address the many treatment options that are available for depression. The purpose of this week's tip is to identify the different types and symptoms of depression.

### What is depression?

Everyone occasionally feels sad or blue, but these feelings are usually short-term and pass within a couple days. When a person is experiencing depression, the condition interferes with daily life and normal functioning. Depression is a serious illness, and most people who have it need treatment to get better.

### Types of depression

There are several types of depression, which doctors call depressive disorders. The two most common types are major depression and dysthymia.

- **Major depression** is characterized by a combination of symptoms that interfere with the ability to work, sleep, eat, and enjoy activities that used to be pleasurable. This type of depression is disabling and keeps a person from functioning normally. An episode of major depression may occur only once or twice, but it can also recur throughout a lifetime.
- **Dysthymia**, a less-severe type of depression, involves long-term, chronic symptoms that last for two years or more. The symptoms are not disabling, but they keep a person from functioning at "full steam" or from feeling good. Sometimes people with dysthymia also experience major depressive episodes.

Some forms of depression have slightly different characteristics than these two or may develop under unique circumstances. Not all researchers agree on how to define these other forms of depression.

- **Psychotic depression** occurs when severe depression is accompanied by a form of psychosis, such as delusions, hallucinations, or a break with reality.
- **Postpartum depression** is diagnosed when a new mother has a major depressive episode within one month of giving birth.
- **Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)** involves depression during the winter months, when there is less sunlight. It generally eases in the spring and summer.
- **Bipolar disorder**, also known as manic-depressive illness, causes severe mood swings – from extreme highs (mania) to extreme lows (depression).

### Symptoms of depression

People who are depressed may not have all symptoms of the condition. Some people experience a few symptoms, and some have many. Their frequency and severity of the symptoms may vary from one person to the next. Symptoms of depression include the following:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" moods
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and once-enjoyable activities
- Sleeping difficulties, such as trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Eating too much or too little
- Fatigue, lack of energy, or feeling "slowed down"
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Restlessness or irritability
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain
- Exaggerated sense of responsibility for events outside a person's control