

Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. Also called major depressive disorder or clinical depression, it affects how you feel, think and behave and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems. You may have trouble doing normal day-to-day activities, and sometimes you may feel as if life isn't worth living.

## Causes

It's not known exactly what causes depression. As with many mental disorders, a variety of factors may be involved, such as:

- Biological differences
- Brain chemistry
- Hormones
- Inherited traits

## Symptoms

Although depression may occur only once during your life, people typically have multiple episodes. During these episodes, symptoms occur most of the day, nearly every day and may include:

- Feelings of sadness, tearfulness, emptiness or hopelessness
- Angry outbursts, irritability or frustration, even over small matters
- Loss of interest or pleasure in most or all normal activities, such as sex, hobbies or sports
- Sleep disturbances, including insomnia or sleeping too much
- Tiredness and lack of energy, so even small tasks take extra effort
- Reduced appetite and weight loss or increased cravings for food and weight gain
- Anxiety, agitation or restlessness
- Slowed thinking, speaking or body movements
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, fixating on past failures or self-blame
- Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions and remembering things
- Frequent or recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts or suicide
- Unexplained physical problems, such as back pain or headaches

## When to Get Emergency Help

If you think you may hurt yourself or attempt suicide, call 911 or your local emergency number immediately.

Also consider these options if you're having suicidal thoughts:

- Call your doctor or mental health professional.
- Call a suicide hotline number — in the U.S., call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1.800.273.TALK (1.800.273.8255). Use that same number and press "1" to reach the Veterans Crisis Line.
- Reach out to a close friend or loved one.
- Contact a minister, spiritual leader or someone else in your faith community.