

# What is Depression?

## General Facts

Depression is a very common, yet highly treatable, medical illness that can affect anyone. About 1 in every 20 Americans get depressed every year. Depression is not a character flaw, nor is it a sign of personal weakness. Depression is a treatable medical illness. Unfortunately, many persons with depression do not tell their doctor how they are feeling. This is very regrettable since effective treatments are available for depression, and most people with depression can begin to feel better in several weeks when they are adequately treated. Talking with a doctor about how they are feeling is the depressed person's first important step toward getting better.

## What is Depression?

Depression isn't just feeling "down in the dumps". It is more than feeling sad following a loss or hassled by hard times. Depression is a medical disorder (just like diabetes and high blood pressure are medical disorders) that affects your thoughts, feelings, physical health and behaviors. People with major depression experience a number of symptoms all day, nearly every day, for at least 2 weeks.

## Symptoms include:

- ✓ Feeling sad, blue or down in the dumps
- ✓ Loss of interest in things you usually enjoy
- ✓ Feeling slowed down or restless
- ✓ Having trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- ✓ Loss of energy or feeling tired all the time
- ✓ Having an increase or decrease in appetite or weight
- ✓ Having problems concentrating, thinking, remembering or making decisions
- ✓ Feeling worthless or guilty
- ✓ Having thoughts of death or suicide

## If I'm Depressed, What Can Be Done About It?

The good news is that *depression is treatable*. Your primary care doctor can effectively treat depression by supportive counseling, prescribing an antidepressant medication and/or referring depressed persons to a mental health professional for counseling. Talking with your doctor about how you are feeling is a very important first step. You can further help your doctor treat you most effectively by participating actively in treatment by (a) asking questions and (b) following through with the treatment that both you and your doctor decide is best for you.

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