

Depression : Am I Clinically Depressed?

Doctors look for a number of symptoms, not just sad mood, if they suspect someone might be suffering from a major depression. Here's a short list of the symptoms they are likely to look for. If you check off at least five of the items on the following list, and symptoms have been present most days, all day, for at least two weeks, you should seek help.

Depressed mood (may include irritability in children and adolescents)

Marked loss of interest or pleasure in activities which used to give you pleasure

Significant weight loss or gain

Insomnia (usually early morning awakening rather than inability to fall asleep) or sleeping too much

Feelings of either apathy or agitation

No energy

Feelings of worthlessness and/or guilt

Inability to concentrate or make decisions

Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

Symptoms of Depression

The symptoms of depression go far beyond a depressed mood or an unshakable sadness. Some symptoms can be overlooked completely that point to depression.

Common symptoms other than depressed mood include irritability, intolerance, anger, or impatience. Conversely, a total lack of the ability to feel anything about anything is just as common, a lack of caring or interest about people, things or activities that used to be special to you, whether it's personal relationships, work, recreation, food or sex. You may want to isolate yourself from friends and coworkers, avoiding social situations. You may have difficulty concentrating, and can't motivate yourself to do anything, whether it's completing an assignment, paying bills, or shopping for groceries.

Understanding a Diagnosis of Depression

The effectiveness of any treatment for depression will depend in large part on the cooperative efforts of both the patient and their physician. Your physician should inform you of the diagnosis and what it means, including prognosis (what to expect), treatment options, how long treatment may be necessary, and potential side effects of treatment.

If you or someone you know has been diagnosed with depression, it is important to remember the following:

Depression is a medical illness, not a character defect or weakness or something that you have brought on yourself.

Depression is very treatable, and recovery is the rule not the exception.

The goal of treatment is complete relief from the symptoms of depression, and more importantly, not just getting better, but staying better.

There are many effective options for treatment, and an effective treatment can be found for nearly all patients even if the first ones tried are not successful.

The chance that depression will return is high: 50% after one depressive episode, 70% after two, and 90% after three episodes.

Both the individual and their family should be alert to early signs and symptoms of recurrence and seek treatment early if depression returns.