

# Depression and the holidays

Holidays can be difficult for some people, especially if you are dealing with depression.

Spending time with friends, getting plenty of rest, and thinking about others are ways to deal with the season and may make you feel better.

## Learning about depression

Depression is a mental health condition that causes you to feel sad, lose interest in activities that you used to enjoy, withdraw from others, and have little energy. Depression can also cause people to feel hopeless about the future and to even think about suicide. It is not a character flaw, and it does not mean that you are a bad or weak person.

Depression is very common and affects people of all ages. If you think you may be depressed, tell your doctor. Treatment can help you enjoy life again.

**What causes depression?** When you have depression, there may be problems with activity levels in certain parts of your brain. Chemicals in your brain called neurotransmitters may be out of balance. Most experts believe that a combination of family history (your genes) and stressful life events may cause depression.

**What are the symptoms?** One of the most common symptoms of depression is feeling sad, hopeless, or tearful. The other is losing interest in daily activities you used to enjoy. If you have had these symptoms nearly every day for at least 2 weeks, you might have depression.

**How is it diagnosed?** If your doctor thinks you are depressed, he or she will ask you questions about your health and feelings. Your doctor also may do a physical exam and tests to make sure your depression isn't caused by another disease.

**How is depression treated?** Doctors usually treat depression with counselling or medicines. Often a combination of the two works best. Many people don't get help because they think that they'll get over the depression on their own. But some people do not get better without treatment. In many cases, counselling can work as well as medicines to treat mild to moderate depression. Counselling is done by licensed mental health providers, such as psychologists and social workers. This kind of treatment



deals with how you think about things and how you act each day.

Antidepressant medicines can improve the symptoms of depression in one to three weeks. But it can take six to eight weeks to see more improvement. Your doctor will likely have you keep taking these medicines for at least six months.

If depression is caused by a medical problem, treating that problem may also help relieve the depression.



## Remember these important points during the holiday season

**Be realistic.** Try not to build up the holiday too much in your mind.

**Say no sometimes.** People will understand if you don't do things. Wearing yourself out will make you feel worse.

**It's okay to be sad or lonely.** You don't have to be happy just because it's the holiday season.

**Get help if you need it.** Seek out family or friends for support. Community or church groups can help too. If things get bad, talk with your doctor or counsellor.

## Wellness Articles

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