



Teens and Depression

What is Depression?

Depression during the teen years is very common and affects as many as 1 in 8 young people. There is no single cause for depression and many factors, including genetics, environment, life events and medical conditions, can play a role in how people respond to the things that happen in their lives. Depression affects people of all colors, races, economic statuses and ages. However, girls tend to experience depression more often than boys.

Depression is more than occasionally feeling blue, sad or down in the dumps. Depression is a strong mood involving sadness, discouragement, despair, or hopelessness that lasts for weeks, months or even longer. Depression interferes with a person's ability to participate in normal activities. Depression can be mild or severe and at its worst can create such feelings of despair that a person thinks about suicide.

What are the Symptoms of Depression?

Symptoms that people have when they are depressed can include:

- Feelings of sadness most of the time (for what seems like no reason)
- Lack of energy and feeling tired all the time
- Inability to enjoy things that used to bring pleasure
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Irritability, anger or anxiety
- Inability to concentrate
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Significant changes in sleep patterns (inability to fall asleep, stay asleep, or get up in the morning)
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Aches and pains (with no medical causes)
- Pessimism and indifference (not caring about anything in the present or future)
- Thoughts of death or suicide



When someone has five or more of these symptoms most of the time for two weeks or longer, he or she is probably depressed.

Teens who are depressed show other warning signs such as lack of interest or motivation, poor concentration and increased problems at school. Teens may also abuse drugs or alcohol in an attempt to “escape” feelings of sadness or worthlessness.

Advice for Parents...

If you suspect that your child is depressed, take the time to listen to his/her concerns. Even if you don't think the problem is of real concern, remember that it is very real to your teen.

It is important to keep the lines of communication open even if your child seems to want to withdraw. Instead of telling your child what to do, try listening to what he/she has to say about the things that are on his/her mind.

If you feel overwhelmed or unable to reach your child or if you continue to be concerned, seek help as soon as possible from a qualified healthcare professional.

How is Depression Treated?

80% of people who get help for depression have a better quality of life and are able to feel better and enjoy themselves in a way they weren't able to before. Treatment for depression can include therapy, medication or a combination of both.

Therapy with a mental health professional is very effective in treating depression. Therapy sessions help patients understand more about why they feel depressed and how to combat the depression.

Sometimes, a doctor will prescribe medication for a person who has depression. When prescribing medicine, a doctor will carefully monitor the patient to make sure the dosage is correct. It can take a few weeks before the medicine starts to work. Because everyone's brain is different, what works well for one person may not work for another.

If you suspect that your child is depressed, don't wait to get help! Call a pediatrician, psychologist, social worker or school counselor - he or she can provide you with resources of where to go for assistance.

For more information and resources, see www.kidshealth.org.