

Understanding depression

If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of depression, you're not alone. About 40% of college students say they have felt so depressed they had a hard time functioning. And almost two-thirds of students have reported feeling overwhelming anxiety during school.*

How can I tell if I'm suffering from depression?

Common symptoms include ongoing sadness and loss of interest in life. Unlike normal sadness or grief, depression doesn't go away on its own. It's important to get help. Without it, depression can last for months or years, and can even be life-threatening.

Should I get emergency help?

If you think you may hurt yourself or attempt suicide, call 911 immediately.

If you're having suicidal thoughts you also can:

- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255), it's available 24/7.
- Call your doctor or mental health professional. You can call the member service number on your ID card to find a provider, check if you need a referral, or see if a provider is in your network.
- Reach out to a close friend or loved one.
- Contact a minister, spiritual leader or someone else in your faith community.
- Call the 24/7 NurseLine at 1-866-787-6361 to speak with a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

What causes depression?

In most cases, depression doesn't have a single cause. It's a disease that can affect anyone.

- **Biology:** Researchers believe an imbalance of chemicals in your brain may cause depression.
- **Genetics:** If depression runs in your family, you have a higher chance of becoming depressed.
- **Health conditions:** Chronic and disabling medical conditions that may have no cure can raise your risk of becoming depressed.
- **Trauma and grief:** Trauma, including violence or physical or emotional abuse, can trigger depression. Grief after the death of a friend or loved one is a normal emotion, but it can sometimes lead to clinical depression.
- **Changes and stressful events:** Going to college is a time of big changes — both good and bad — which can trigger depression.
- **Medicines and substances:** Many prescription drugs can cause symptoms of depression. Alcohol or substance abuse can make these worse. It can also interfere with how a medicine prescribed to treat depression works.

What are the symptoms?

It's normal to feel sad sometimes or have a bad day, but a person with depression has some of these symptoms for more than two weeks:

- Persistent sadness or anxiety
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt or worthlessness
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Fatigue or decreased energy level
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, waking too early or oversleeping
- Increased or decreased appetite
- Wanting to avoid other people, including friends and family
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems without a clear physical cause
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts

Can I prevent depression?

There's no guaranteed way to prevent depression. However, these strategies can help:

- **Take steps to control stress** — to raise your spirit and boost your self-esteem.
- **Reach out to family and friends** — to help you through hard times, especially in times of crisis.
- **Get treatment at the earliest sign of a problem** — to prevent depression from getting worse.

How can I cope with depression?

- **Ask for help.** Reach out to a doctor, trusted friend or family member. Depression won't go away on its own, so it's important to get professional help.
- **Use LiveHealth Online Psychology.** Sign up at livehealthonline.com or download the app to see a therapist or psychologist from the privacy of your own home. Appointments can be arranged within a few days.
- **Set realistic goals.** Break big tasks into smaller ones so you feel less overwhelmed.
- **Spend time with loved ones.** You might feel like hiding from the world, but being alone can make depression worse. Spend time with people you care about.
- **Avoid making big decisions.** Depression can cloud your thinking. Discuss any big changes with people who know you well.
- **Be patient with yourself.** Remind yourself to take it one day at a time. With time and treatment, you'll feel like yourself again.
- **Call Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield's Behavioral Health Resource Center.** You can talk to a licensed clinician 24/7. Call 1-855-679-5722, press 2, then choose option 4 to speak with somebody right away.



* Katie Reilly, "Record Numbers of College Students Are Seeking Treatment for Depression and Anxiety — But Schools Can't Keep Up," TIME Magazine, March 9, 2018.
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