

What is depression?

Everyone feels down at times. Ending a relationship, getting poor grades, and sometimes no apparent reason can be responsible for sadness. The breakup of a relationship or a poor evaluation in class can lead to low spirits. Sometimes sadness comes on for no apparent reason. Is there any difference between these shifting moods and what is called depression? Anyone who has experienced an episode of depression would probably answer yes.

The duration and depth of despondency, and the presence of characteristic symptoms, help distinguish depression from ordinary unhappiness. This is important because in severe cases depression can be life threatening. Suicide is a possible outcome.

Depressed individuals may also fail to live up to their potential, doing poorly in school and staying on the social margin. Depression is frequently ignored or untreated; the condition often prevents people from taking steps to help themselves. This is unfortunate as effective help is available.

What Causes Depression?

There is growing evidence that depression has a biological basis. It is experienced more often in people whose close relatives have been affected. Research on physiology of the nervous system suggests that activity in "neurotransmitters" (e.g., serotonin and norepinephrine) changes in long standing depressions: anti-depressant medicines probably work by correcting a "chemical imbalance" of this kind. A number of physical illnesses also lead to depression: an examination by a physician can uncover medical causes.

It is also clear that psychological and social factors play a vital role. The loss of a loved one, or a disappointment, may trigger depression; past losses, perhaps not fully acknowledged, often set the stage. Some individuals find that they get caught in patterns of negative thinking that perpetuates depressed feelings. Lack of social supports and the absence of avenues for fulfillment also predispose some to depression. Whatever the cause, there are several effective and accessible treatments that really work.

Signs & Symptoms of Depression

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| * Lost pleasure in most activities. | * Sleep changes (too much / too little) |
| * Fatigued / lacking energy | * Increased/decreased appetite |
| * Feeling sad, blue, or down in the dumps | * Headaches, other aches and pains |
| * Feeling hopeless about future | * Feeling worthless or self-blame |
| * Difficulty concentrating | * Exaggerated guilty feelings |
| * Unrealistic ideas / worries | * Frequently tearful |
| * Decreased interest in sex | * Thoughts of suicide |

People feeling sad or depressed can get help and live very fulfilled lives. Treatment is available. Recovery can help with new ways of thinking and coping with life stress. Recognizing the difficulty and reaching for support is an important first step!

How can I help a depressed person?

By listening in an open, non-judgmental way, it can help to show appreciation of the struggle but not enter into the despair. Simple and practical advice, like reminders to meet basic needs like eating/sleeping and enjoyable activity. When a threat or real possibility of suicide exists, stay close to the individual until you can find professional help. If the person resists, while it may be difficult, the consequences of not seeking help can be very serious. It is a sign of caring to listen and help get him/her connected to treatment that can alleviate suffering and save a life. Take good care of yourself, too!

CPS Contact Information

CPS provides many services including individual, group, couples, family, counseling, and stress reduction.

Psychological Crisis or Suicidal Concerns

(M-Fri 8am – 5pm):

CPS: 459-2628
Psychiatry 459-2214
Student Health 459-2211

24-Hour Crisis or Suicidal Concerns:

Suicide Prevention of
Santa Cruz 458-5300
Or 1-877-663-5433
UC Emergency 911

Psychiatric Emergencies

After 5pm and Weekends
County Mental Health
462-7644

For more information
visit our website:
www2.ucsc.edu/counsel

Effective ways to beat the blues & feel better:

- Think about possible causes of your depression and be active in your treatment. Small shifts in thinking and behaviors can make a very big difference.
- Seek out professional help to overcome depression. Look for a caring counselor, psychologist, or doctor to assist you.
- Examine some of your negative thoughts (e.g., blaming yourself, perfectionism, or expecting failure), keep a record of them. Finding more positive thoughts to replace the negative ones can change the way you feel and lift your mood.
- Focus on your positive experiences, accomplishments (even small ones!), and good relationships.
- Engage in activities that you enjoy – if you stopped doing something because of the sadness, find a way to integrate it back into your life.
- Increase your social connections...find other people to be with or to do enjoyable activities with. This fights off stress and can be healing.
- Do some exercise—even little amounts help, try to reach 3 times per week. Pick an activity you enjoy and do it. Research indicates that exercise can be as effective as medication.
- Take good care of your body ... eat well, avoid alcohol and drugs which increase the sadness, .
- Use self-relaxation techniques like deep breathing, visualizing relaxing places or visualizing better moods.
- Set a few realistic and achievable goals and allow yourself to succeed in achieving them.
- Consider the possibility of using one of several effective anti-depressant treatments available through your doctor.
- Recognize that depression takes time to develop and be patient with yourself as you work your way to feeling good again.

Thoughts on suicide:

It is not unusual for those who feel seriously depressed to think of suicide or that “life is not worth living.” Several factors increase a person’s risk for suicide, including previous attempts, recent losses, a family history of suicide, and alcohol/drug use. Research shows that suicidal impulses are intense but short-lived and individuals who are suicidal recover and feel glad to be alive. If you are concerned about yourself or a friend, we urge you to seek help immediately. It can help to talk about those intense feelings and alleviate the loneliness of the struggle. It can also be one of the first steps in obtaining help. Please use the numbers shown here or call 1-800-SUICIDE, a crisis hotline for additional support.

Did you know...

That Counseling and Psychological Services offers individual counseling for depression and also offers occasional group support for healing from depression and sadness. CPS also makes referrals to community resources that can help. Call 459-2628 to get more information for yourself or for someone you care about.