

# Depression

## What is Depression?

Depression is a common mental illness that affects nearly 10 percent of the people in the United States. It is a treatable, medical condition — not a personal weakness. Everybody at one point or another experiences sadness or the “blues” as a reaction to loss, grief, or an emotionally upsetting incident. Someone might say they are “depressed,” but major depression is a serious medical condition requiring professional diagnosis and treatment. Depression left untreated can lead to other health care and life problems, and if severe enough, even suicide.



## What Causes Depression?

Depression can be caused by one specific incident or a combination of factors. Grief over the loss of a loved one, a major life change, physical or emotional harm by another person, a physical injury, illness, or even side effects of medication could cause depression. Depression can also be caused by changes in the brain, and in many instances is hereditary. Depression often runs in families.

## What are the Symptoms of Depression?

Symptoms of depression may include sadness, hopelessness, irritability, feelings of guilt, crying spells, sleep and eating disturbances, a negative self-image, the inability to feel joy, changes in body weight, decrease in energy or sexual interest, headaches, and thoughts of suicide. Depression may include other symptoms not listed here. Do not blame yourself for symptoms of depression and do not permit them to grow worse. Instead, seek help.

## Myths About Depression

There are many myths about depression. These include the beliefs that depression is a sign of weakness and that you are hopeless, crazy, or should be able to “just snap out of it.” It is also a myth that depression causes alcoholism or other drug addictions. Addictive diseases are primary illnesses, which means they are not secondary or caused by other medical conditions. It is possible to have both diagnoses at the same time. This is called a “dual-diagnosis.”

## How is Depression Treated?

Depression may be treated with or without medication, with individual or group counseling, diet, exercise, or other types of interventions including alternative therapies. Regardless of the approach taken, it is important to have depression evaluated by a medical doctor, preferably a psychiatrist. Thoughts of suicide warrant the immediate need for medical help.

## What the MAP Can Do.

The MAP can screen you for depression or refer you to another resource that can provide a depression screening. The MAP can also help you find medical help for further evaluation and treatment in accordance with your health insurance plan. If you do not have insurance, the MAP can help you locate other resources. Later, the MAP can provide follow-up and support.