Depression: Facts and Finding Help and Support—Steps to take in finding help and support

Depression is a common and serious mental health disorder that can interfere with our ability to work, relate to others, engage in activities, and enjoy life. Fortunately, most people with depression can be helped with treatment.

This is the third in a three-part series of articles on depression which starts with “Types, symptoms, and causes of depression.” Read the previous article, “Treatment options.”

Steps to take in finding help and support

If you may be suffering from depression, try to see a professional as soon as possible. Some research suggests that the longer you wait, the more problems you may have later on. You can also help yourself by taking these steps:

Try to stay active or exercise. Do things you’ve enjoyed in the past, like going to the movies or a sports event or walking in your favorite park. Take part in social, religious, and other activities that have had meaning for you.

Set goals you can achieve. Focus on what’s realistic for you to accomplish, not on what you or others think you “should” accomplish.

Break large tasks into small ones and set priorities. Do what you can, as you can. Tell yourself you will work at the task for 10 or 15 minutes. Then if you want to work longer, that’s great.

Keep your expectations realistic. Expecting too much too soon may increase feelings of failure if you fall short. Give yourself credit for what you have accomplished, even if that seems small.

Try to spend time with other people. Talk with a trusted friend or relative, and
try to avoid becoming isolated.

**Put off making major life decisions, such as whether to change jobs or get married or divorced, until you feel better.** If you need to make a big decision, talk about it with people who know you well.

**Expect to improve gradually, not overnight.** Don’t assume you can “snap out of” depression or see progress right away.

**Remember that you can replace your negative thinking with positive thoughts.** Negative thinking is part of depression. It will ease or disappear as your depression responds to treatment.

**Finding professional help**

If you aren’t sure where to turn for help with depression, start by talking with your doctor. Others who can provide help or referrals include:

**Mental health professionals,** such as psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and clergy members who have special training in counseling.

**Community resources,** including family and social service agencies and mental health centers, programs, and clinics.

**National organizations and agencies.** Good places to start in North America include the websites of National Alliance on Mental Illness, Mental Health America, and the Canadian Mental Health Association. The National Institute of Mental Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada also have extensive information about depression on their websites.

**If you feel suicidal**

Take action right away if your depression is causing you to think of hurting yourself or someone else. For immediate help:

**Call your doctor.** Be honest and upfront. Your doctor can only help you based on the information you share. You should tell them how you have been feeling and
what you have been thinking.

**Call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room.** Ask a friend or relative to help you do these things if you can’t do them yourself. Hospitals and emergency rooms have psychiatrists on staff. If you need an immediate evaluation, this is the quickest way to be seen by professional.

**Call the toll-free 24-hour hotline of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255).** You’ll be connected to a trained counselor. In Canada you can also call the crisis center for your province or territory, which you’ll find listed at the [Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention](https://www.caspa.ca/).

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