



No matter how depressed you are, you can feel better.

**M**ost people have some kind of depression at some point in their lives. It can range from a minor problem to a major, life-threatening illness.

If you have had five or more of the following symptoms nearly every day for more than two weeks, you may have depression:

- Feeling sad, blue, tearful, hopeless, or down
- Showing little interest or pleasure in things you used to enjoy (including sex)
- Changes in appetite, causing you to gain or lose weight
- Sleeping much more or less than usual
- Feeling restless, irritable, or angry
- Feeling tired or a loss of energy
- Feeling worthless or a lot of guilt
- Having a hard time concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Feeling like life isn't worth living
- Thinking about death or suicide

## Contributing Factors

Many things can contribute to depression. These can include:

- Imbalances in brain chemicals called neurotransmitters
- Other illnesses or disabilities
- Personal or family history of depression
- Major life events (loss of a loved one, work stress, retirement, divorce, or marital difficulties)
- Domestic violence and other types of trauma
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Hormonal changes
- Low self-esteem

## Self-care

Try some of these tips for taking care of yourself over the next two weeks. They may help you feel better.

### Get moving.

Even if you aren't in the mood for it, exercise is good for your mind and body. You will have more energy, reduce stress, and feel better.

Exercise includes walking, bicycling, and swimming. Work your way up to 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.

### Find joy again.

Believe it or not, pleasure is good for you! Think of things that you enjoy—big or small—and do them. It can be anything from listening to music or walking your dog to spending time with friends. You may have to push yourself at first, but it will help you feel better.

### Reach out.

Get in touch with friends or family. Depression can get worse if you isolate yourself. Meaningful contact with others can help you feel less lonely.

### Pay attention to what you eat.

It can be comforting to eat too many sweets or unhealthy foods when you feel low. Don't skip meals, starting with breakfast. Switch to healthier snacks and eat regular-sized portions.

**Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and illegal drugs.**

Many people start drinking more caffeine or alcohol; or take illegal drugs to help them feel better. But these can make things worse and interfere with prescribed medicines. Get support for making healthier choices.

**Be positive.**

As you start these steps, tell yourself you are doing the right things to lighten your mood. Look for signs that your depression is getting better, such as going back to activities you enjoy or connecting with friends. Remind yourself that these are positive steps.

**Herbs and supplements**

Some research shows that an herb called St. John's Wort may help mild to moderate depression. However, there are safety concerns. The Food and Drug Administration does not regulate St. John's Wort, and it can change how other medications work. If you are thinking about using St. John's Wort, be sure to talk to your doctor or other health care professional.



Herbs and supplements are sold over-the-counter. Kaiser Permanente pharmacies carry only herb categories for which evidence exists to show that they may be effective to treat specific medical conditions.

**What to do when self-care doesn't work**

No matter how depressed you are, you can feel better. Self-care may be enough to pull you out of a mild depression. For a more serious depression, professional help may be needed.

The good news is that medical treatment can help symptoms of depression. Treatment includes counseling, medication, classes, and self-care. You can get professional treatment at Kaiser Permanente in the Department of Psychiatry or Mental Health. Health care professionals in the Department of Medicine can also treat you with medications.

**Call Kaiser Permanente if . . .**

- You have thoughts of suicide
- Home treatment doesn't help lift your mood within two weeks
- You have five or more symptoms of depression nearly every day for two or more weeks

**Additional resources**

- [kp.org](http://kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and more.
- [kp.org/depression](http://kp.org/depression)
- [kp.org/mindbody](http://kp.org/mindbody)
- [kp.org/healthylifestyles](http://kp.org/healthylifestyles) for customized online depression or stress management plans from HealthMedia® Overcoming Depression™ Healthy Lifestyles and HealthMedia® Relax™ Healthy Lifestyles.
- National Institute of Mental Health [nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov)
- Contact your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

**Hotlines**

- National Depressive/Manic Depressive Association  
1-800-826-3632
- National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Hotline  
1-800-662-4357
- National Institute of Mental Health  
1-800-647-2642
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to [ndvh.org](http://ndvh.org).

**Books**

- *Self-Esteem*, Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning, New Harbinger Publications Inc. (1992)
- *The Mind & Body Health Handbook*, David Sobel, MD, and Robert Ornstein, PHD (1998)
- *The Feeling Good Handbook*, David Burns, Plume (1999)

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.