



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

Depression is more than having the blues or feeling a little down. Depression is a serious medical condition that can affect your physical and emotional well-being.

If you've had 5 or more of the following symptoms nearly every day for more than 2 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.
- Thinking about death or suicide.

If you are thinking of harming yourself, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. You may also call the Suicide Hotline at 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433).

Contributing factors

Many things can contribute to depression. These can include:

- Changes in brain chemicals.
- 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.

Self-care

There are several actions you can take to improve your mood. Try some of these tips for taking care of yourself.

Get moving

Exercise is good for your mind and body. Over time you will have more energy, reduce stress, and feel better. You can start with walking a few blocks and 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 hard to eat right 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 who are depressed 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 improve your health. 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.

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 guided 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 2 weeks.
- You have 5 or more symptoms of depression nearly every day for 2 or more weeks.

Additional resources

For more health information, tools, health classes, and other resources visit:

- kp.org/mydoctor
- kp.org/depression
- kp.org/carefordepression (a customized online depression program)

Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department.

Books

- The Feeling Good Handbook, David Burns (2008).

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.