



# Focus on HEALTH



## Are You Depressed?

By Diane E. Scott, RN, MSN

**AT** some point, everyone will encounter a life experience that will challenge their mental well-being. Few people are immune to a lifetime free of job concerns, loss of a loved one, or worries about financial issues that may trigger feelings of grief and melancholy. While it is normal to feel sad or “down” on occasion, for some people, those feelings do not lessen over time.

### When do those emotions translate into the diagnosis of depression?

To begin with, it is important to state that depression is a serious medical condition that is one of the most common health conditions in the world. For some people, depression is something that they may experience only once, while others may have repeated episodes of varying degrees throughout their lifetime.

It is important to state that depression is not a sign of weakness or something that is all “in your head”. Depression is serious as it interferes with daily life activities and relationships with others. Some people experiencing depression even entertain thoughts of sui-

cide. It is important to recognize that depression is a real and serious condition that is treatable with effective diagnosis and treatment

### What causes depression?

There are many risk factors for depression including biological, cognitive, and social factors. For some people, a significant event such as a job loss or illness can trigger an episode of depression. According to the American Psychological Association, some depressions are a sign that certain mental and emotional aspects of a person’s life are out of balance, especially when a person’s feelings of sadness last for two weeks or longer.

### What are the signs?

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, people with depressive illnesses do not all experience the same symptoms. The severity, frequency, and duration of symptoms will vary depending on the individual and his or her particular illness.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health some of the symptoms can include:

- persistent sad, anxious or "empty" feelings;
- feelings of hopelessness and/or pessimism;
- feelings of guilt, worthlessness and/or helplessness
- Irritability, restlessness;
- loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable, including sex;
- fatigue and decreased energy;
- difficulty concentrating, remembering details and making decisions;
- insomnia, early morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- overeating or appetite loss;
- thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts; and
- persistent aches or pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems that do not ease even with treatment.

Regardless of the symptoms that you or a loved one may be experiencing, it is important that you seek assistance from a trained professional. The National Institute of Mental Health website states that, if you are unsure, you may ask your family doctor or go to a variety of mental health resources listed on their website.



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## Preventing suicide

Depression can lead to suicide. It is a real and significant threat. For more information and help, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) is a 24-hour, toll-free, confidential suicide prevention hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. By dialing 1-800-273-TALK, the call is routed to the nearest crisis center in a national network of more than 140 crisis centers. The Lifeline's national network of local crisis centers, provide crisis counseling and mental health referrals day and night.

## Resources

Because of the commonality of depression, there are a multitude of resources available to understand the signs of depression. Some of those resources are listed below:

National Suicide Prevention

<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression/index.shtml>

Mayo Clinic Health Pages

[http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression/MH00103\\_D](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression/MH00103_D)

American Psychiatric Associations:

<http://www.apa.org/topics/topicdepress.html>

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