

# Depression

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Depression can be considered a mood state, a syndrome, or simply a symptom. How it is considered depends in large part on its severity and the degree to which it is interfering with ordinary functioning. The risk of death from depression is higher than that of breast cancer. So, it is important to consider the seriousness of this disorder. Clinical depression causes difficulty for about one out of every four adults sometime during their lifetimes. If your quality of life is being affected by this condition, you may benefit from treatment.

The most common factors that seem to be found among people who are clinically depressed are prior depressive episodes, a family history of depression, being female, ovarian hormonal fluctuations, and high levels of stress or trauma. Both hysterectomy (removal of the uterus) and tubal ligation (severing the fallopian tubes) cause less blood to flow to the ovaries. This can result in less production of ovarian hormones and bring on depression. Partial oophorectomy, or the removal of one ovary, can also decrease the amount of hormones available and leave the woman open to depression. Complete (bilateral) oophorectomy means that no ovarian hormones will be produced, and this can raise the likelihood of depression, particularly in young women.

Depression hits women significantly more than men. This inordinate prevalence among women may be related to numerous factors, such as genetics, stress, socioeconomic status, traumatic events, use of stimulants and hallucinogens, use and abuse of alcohol and drugs, and ovarian hormone makeup and its interaction with neurotransmitters. (Although alcoholism is five times higher among men, women with this affliction often experience much more depression and anxiety.) Any combination of these factors can cause biochemical changes, leading to a depressive condition. Depression can also result from chronic medical conditions, such as complications of hypothyroidism and diabetes.

There are three major depression syndromes: Major Depressive Disorder, Dysthymic Disorder, and Bipolar Disorder. Each of these clusters of symptoms includes the following:

- Sadness
- A persistent down mood
- Loss of interest in normally pleasurable activities
- Changes in sleep, appetite, and sexual desire
- Poor concentration

- Narrowing of attention span
- Thoughts of suicide
- Feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy
- Hopelessness
- Fatigue

Men and women who experience these symptoms in an intense and ongoing way, at levels that interfere with social and occupational functioning, are likely to be suffering from depression.

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