

Having a physical illness can cause you to feel “down” or sad. But if the sadness is severe or long-lasting, it could be a result of clinical depression, co-occurring with a medical condition.

## **What is depression co-occurring with a medical condition?**

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Clinical depression is a serious but treatable illness, with symptoms estimated to occur in as many as one third of people with any medical condition. Depression can cause changes in eating and sleeping patterns, problems with memory and concentration, decreased energy and feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness, as well as, negative or pessimistic thinking.

## **What types of co-occurring illnesses are often associated with depression?**

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- Heart disease (stroke/heart attack)
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- HIV
- Loss of limb
- Kidney failure

## **What are the symptoms of depression?**

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Weight loss, sleep disturbance and low energy occur are common symptoms of depression. Apathy, poor concentration, memory loss and achiness are also associated with depression.

Medically ill people may become depressed as a psychological reaction to the prognosis, pain and incapacity caused by the illness or its treatment.

## **What type of treatment is available?**

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If the depressive symptoms are part of the medical illness or side effects of medications, treatment may be adjusted or changed.

If clinical depression is an additional problem, it can be treated, and treatment can start to work within a few weeks.

Your doctor must first find out whether you have one diagnosis or two. This requires careful evaluation, especially in illnesses with similar symptoms.

If you are diagnosed with depression along with your co-occurring medical illness treatment treating the co-occurring depression can have a positive effect on the course of the medical illness. In addition, treating the depression often improves a person’s ability to properly manage the chronic illnesses, such as diabetes and heart disease, and can significantly enhance an individual’s quality of life.

With treatment, up to 80% of all depressed people can improve, usually within weeks. Treatment includes medication, psychotherapy or a combination of both

## **What are risk factors associated with depression co-occurring with a medical condition?**

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Studies indicate that the more severe the medical condition, the more likely it is that a person will experience clinical depression.

Other factors which increase the risk of depression in people with co-occurring medical conditions are:

- History of depressive illness
- Alcohol or other substance abuse
- Poorly controlled pain
- Advanced disease
- Disability or disfigurement
- Medications such as steroids and chemotherapy agents
- The presence of other physical illness
- Social isolation
- Socioeconomic pressures

## **Are you depressed?**

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Take the questionnaire below to determine if you’re at risk for depression.

- Do you wake up early in the morning and find you can’t go back to sleep?
- Do you often feel extremely tired without apparent reason?
- Do you lack self confidence and doubt yourself?
- Do you feel lonely or withdrawn from the world?
- Do you feel worthless?
- Do you eat too much?
- Do you drink too much?
- Do you find it difficult to concentrate?
- Do you find it difficult to think logically or make decisions?
- Are you procrastinating or avoiding doing things?
- Have you lost interest in sexual activity?
- Are you apathetic and lacking in motivation?

- Do you sometimes feel like crying?
- Do you see no future for yourself?
- Do you feel trapped?
- Do you feel you can't cope?
- Do you have trouble sleeping at night?
- Do you feel life is not worth living?
- Do you suffer from quick mood swings?

**If you answered yes to:**

- **Less than five questions**, you could have a low level of depression or the beginnings of depression.
- **Five to ten questions**, you could have a moderate level of depression.
- **Eleven plus questions**, you could have a high level of depression.

## **HELPLINE**

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If you are worried about your level of depression, call our 24-hour HELPLINE at 800.238.8661 to speak with a qualified and caring professional. The call is confidential and free.

# **Depression and Co-occurring Illness**

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