

Understanding Depression

People with depression can experience a variety of emotional and physical symptoms. For some people, it's a matter of feeling sad, overwhelmed, or stressed out. For others, aches, pains, fatigue, and other physical problems are part of their depression too.

Many researchers believe depression is caused by an imbalance of two naturally-occurring chemicals -- serotonin and norepinephrine -- in the brain and the body. In the brain, these two chemicals are thought to be associated with mood. If these chemicals are out of balance, the effect can be felt in both the brain and body. You can feel both the emotional and painful physical symptoms of depression.

Where Does Depression Hurt?

Depression can hurt everywhere — both emotionally and physically. Someone with depression might think or say any of the following:

- "I feel sad all the time."
- "I just don't feel like myself."
- "I don't enjoy being with my friends or doing any of the things I usually love to do."
- "I feel completely overwhelmed by my life. I can't see a way out."
- "I've been having a lot of trouble sleeping lately."
- "I keep having aches and pains, and I don't know why."

Depression affects anywhere from 10% to 20% of Americans in any given year. Research suggests that about two-thirds of people diagnosed with depression talk to their family doctors first about physical symptoms. Many people experience many of the emotional and physical symptoms listed below:

Emotional	Physical
Sadness throughout the day, nearly every day Loss of interest in or enjoyment of your favorite activities Feelings of emptiness or hopelessness Feeling stressed, nervous, or overwhelmed Trouble concentrating or making decisions Feelings of worthlessness Excessive or inappropriate feelings of guilt Irritability or restlessness Thoughts of death or suicide	Fatigue or lack of energy Sleeping too much or too little Change in appetite or weight Aches and pains Headache Back pain Digestive problems Dizziness

Some risk factors for depression include:

- A family history of depression
- Death or illness of a loved one
- Stressful conflicts, such as fights with family members or disputes at work
- Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
- Major life events, such as moving, graduating from college, changing jobs, getting married or divorced, becoming a new parent, or retiring
- Financial difficulties

Are you sadder than sad? Take this online depression test:

http://www.lessons4living.com/depression_test2.htm

If you think that you are depressed, please know that it is not normal to feel this way. If you have had several of the symptoms mentioned in this article, during a two week period, make an appointment to discuss this matter with your family physician.

For more information on depression, visit these websites:

http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=9857&cn=353

<http://www.lessons4living.com/depression.htm>

http://www.healthyplace.com/Communities/Depression/related/self_help.asp