



*Together we can work to keep you healthy.*

Does life seem a lot harder lately? Have you been feeling empty, extremely sad, or worthless? It could be depression.

Most people feel down at some point in their lives. Depression is different. Fortunately, there are treatments that work well for teens who are depressed.

## Risk factors for depression

There are many risk factors that may lead to depression, including:

- A family history of depression
- Losing a parent or someone else close
- Break up of a romantic relationship
- Being injured or dealing with a chronic illness
- Coping with abuse or neglect

- Fighting or other family problems
- Dealing with lots of stress or bullying
- Wondering if you are gay, lesbian, or bisexual
- Traumatic events, such as a natural disaster, crash, or robbery

## How do I know if I'm depressed?

Feeling upset or down now and then is normal, but depression is different. Here is a way to help you find out if you're depressed:

- Have you been feeling sad, hopeless, or empty inside?
- Have you been losing interest in hobbies, sports, or social activities, where things just don't seem fun anymore?
- Have you been feeling more and more jumpy or angry?
- Have you been having trouble getting along with your family or friends?
- Has your appetite changed, causing you to gain or lose weight?
- Has your energy level changed, making you really tired, restless, or irritable?
- Have your sleep patterns changed, either sleeping a lot more or a lot less?
- Have you been feeling really bad about yourself, or have you been really hard on yourself lately?
- Have you been thinking a lot about death and dying?

*These are all signs of depression. If you've been feeling this way for several weeks or longer, please call your health care professional right away. We're here to help.*

## What can I do if I'm depressed?

Depression can be successfully treated with therapy, medication, or a combination of both. With the right treatment, 80 percent of people who reach out for help get better. In fact, many people start to feel better in just a few weeks.

## What teens can do

- Talk to a caring adult, like a parent, favorite relative, a teacher, counselor, or someone at your church, mosque, or synagogue.
- Spend time with family and friends, even though you might want to be alone a lot.

## Alcohol and drugs

Some teens experiencing depression also use alcohol or other drugs. Sometimes the depression comes first, and using alcohol or other drugs can be an attempt to feel better. Other times, the drinking or drug use comes first, and either leads to depression or makes depression worse. No matter which came first, drinking and using drugs while you're depressed can be dangerous. Talk to someone you trust, and get help as soon as you can.

- Get professional help from a counselor, therapist, doctor, or other medical professional.
- Understand that depression is not your fault. Depression is a medical condition—not a lack of willpower.

### Take care of yourself

- Make an effort to get some exercise, even if you don't really feel like it.
- Make sure you're sleeping at least 8 hours a night. and eating 3 well-balanced meals a day.
- Try expressing your feelings by talking with a friend or by writing (or drawing) in a journal.
- Plan to do something enjoyable each day. Try to remember how you felt when you were happier.

### What parents can do

- Talk with your teen and let him or her know that you care and want to help. Don't assume that a teen's moodiness is "just a phase." Try to look beyond disruptive behavior—it may be a cry for help.
- Have your teen evaluated for depression. You can get information from a school counselor, the child and adolescent psychiatry clinic, the teen clinic, or the Health Education Center at your local Kaiser Permanente facility.
- Lock up medications that may be deadly or don't keep them around at all. Do the same for prescription painkillers, antianxiety

medications, and any other pills that can be abused.

- Remove all guns from the home, including hunting rifles.
- Discuss the dangers of alcohol and drugs, explaining to teens that these make moods worse.
- Keep track of the warning signs you observe so that you can discuss them with your teen's doctor or therapist. Make a special note about when and how often symptoms occur.
- Talk with your teen's therapist. Discuss your questions and concerns about treatment.

### Prevent suicide

Thoughts of death or suicide are not uncommon signs in depression. If you feel like you can't cope anymore, or that life isn't worth living, it's really important to get help.

Suicidal feelings, thoughts, impulses, or behaviors should always be taken seriously.

#### If you are thinking of hurting or killing yourself:

- **Call for help right away 1-800-SUICIDE or 911.**
- **Go to any nearby emergency room.**

### Other resources

- Kaiser Permanente's Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Department
- 24-hour California Youth Crisis Hotline: 1-800-843-5200
- Alcohol and Drugs Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP

### Websites

- Visit [kp.org/mydoctor](http://kp.org/mydoctor) for more information on this and other topics of interest to parents and teens.
- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: [aacap.org](http://aacap.org)
- American Academy of Pediatrics: [aap.org](http://aap.org)
- National Institute of Mental Health: [nimh.org](http://nimh.org)

### Books

- *The Feeling Good Handbook*, David D. Burns
  - *More Than Moody: Recognizing and Treating Adolescent Depression*, Harold S. Koplewicz
  - *Mind Over Mood*, Greenberger and Padesky
- If you are being hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or being pressured to have sex, it can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474 or connect to [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org).

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.