

## Depression: Symptoms and Strategies for Coping

Everyone occasionally feels blue or sad, but these feelings are usually short lived and pass within a couple of days. When you have depression, it interferes with daily life and causes pain for both you and those who care about you. Depression is a common yet serious illness.

### What are the signs and symptoms of depression?

People with depression do not all experience the same symptoms. The severity, frequency, and duration of symptoms vary depending on the individual and his or her circumstances.

- Persistent sad, anxious, or empty feelings
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- Irritability or restlessness
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable, including sex
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Difficulty with concentration, details, and decisions
- Insomnia, early wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- Overeating or appetite loss
- Aches, pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not ease even with treatment
- Thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts (If this occurs, seek emergency services immediately)

### Coping strategies

While depression can drain your energy, hope and drive, overcoming depression is very possible. The key to recovery is to start with a few small goals and slowly build from there. Draw upon whatever resources you have. Take things one day at a time, and reward yourself for each accomplishment. The following are some things you can do:

- Turn to trusted family members/friends for support.
- Try to keep up with social activities, even if you don't feel like it. Have lunch, coffee or walk with a friend.
- Help someone else by volunteering.
- A regular sleep routine improves mood and energy.
- Do things you enjoy—like a trip to a museum or the ballpark. Express yourself through a hobby, music, art, or writing.
- Develop a wellness toolbox – watch a funny movie or TV show, play with a pet, take a hot bath, finish small tasks, do something spontaneous.
- Eat a healthy diet with B vitamins and foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids to help stabilize mood. Don't skip meals, minimize sugar and refined carbs, and limit alcohol consumption.
- Exercise works wonders as an antidepressant. Continuous exercise such as swimming, walking and biking are good choices. Add a mind-body element such as yoga. Start slow, and don't overdo it.
- Practice relaxation techniques – deep breathing, meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation can help boost feelings of joy and well-being.
- Know when to get additional help. If you find your depression getting worse, seek out a professional. Your EAP can help. Remember, depression is treatable and you can feel better!