

MEN AND DEPRESSION

Are you tired and irritable all the time? Have you lost interest in your work, family, or hobbies? Are you having trouble sleeping and feeling angry or aggressive, sad, or worthless? Have you been feeling like this for weeks or months? If so, you may have depression.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Everyone feels sad or irritable sometimes, or has trouble sleeping occasionally. But these feelings and troubles usually pass after a couple of days. When a man has depression, he has trouble with daily life and loses interest in anything for weeks at a time.

Both men and women get depression. But men can experience it differently than women. Men may be more likely to feel very tired and irritable, and lose interest in their work, family, or hobbies. They may be more likely to have difficulty sleeping than women who have depression. And although women with depression are more likely to attempt suicide, men are more likely to die by suicide.

Many men do not recognize, acknowledge, or seek help for their depression. They may be reluctant to talk about how they are feeling. But depression is a real and treatable illness. It can affect any man at any age. With the right treatment, most men with depression can get better and gain back their interest in work, family, and hobbies.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION IN MEN?

Different people have different symptoms. Some symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad or “empty”
- Feeling hopeless, irritable, anxious, or angry
- Loss of interest in work, family, or once-pleasurable activities, including sex
- Feeling very tired
- Not being able to concentrate or remember details
- Not being able to sleep, or sleeping too much
- Overeating, or not wanting to eat at all
- Thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems
- Inability to meet the responsibilities of work, caring for family, or other important activities

WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION IN MEN?

Several factors may contribute to depression in men.

1. *Genes*—men with a family history of depression may be more likely to develop it than those whose family members do not have the illness.
2. *Brain chemistry and hormones*—the brains of people with depression look different on scans than those of people without the illness. Also, the hormones that control emotions and mood can affect brain chemistry.
3. *Stress*—loss of a loved one, a difficult relationship or any stressful situation may trigger depression in some men.

Most of the time, it is likely a combination of these factors.

HOW IS DEPRESSION TREATED?

The first step to getting the right treatment is to visit a doctor or mental health professional. He or she can do an exam or lab tests to rule out other conditions that may have the same symptoms as depression. He or she can also tell if certain medications you are taking may be affecting your mood.

The doctor needs to get a complete history of symptoms. Tell the doctor when the symptoms started, how long they have lasted, how bad they are, whether they have occurred before, and if so, how they were treated. Tell the doctor if there is a history of depression in your family.

HOW CAN I HELP A LOVED ONE WHO IS DEPRESSED?

If you know someone who has depression, first help him find a doctor or mental health professional and make an appointment.

- Offer him support, understanding, patience, and encouragement.
- Talk to him, and listen carefully.
- Never ignore comments about suicide. Help him seek help immediately or report the comments to his therapist or doctor.
- Invite him out for walks, outings and other activities. If he says no, keep trying, but don't push him to take on too much too soon.
- Encourage him to report any concerns about medications to his health care provider.
- Ensure that he gets to his doctor's appointments.
- Remind him that with time and treatment, the depression will lift.

HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF IF I AM DEPRESSED?

As you continue treatment, gradually you will start to feel better. Try to do things that you used to enjoy before you had depression. Go easy on yourself. Other things that may help include:

- See a professional as soon as possible. Research shows that getting treatment sooner rather than later can relieve symptoms quicker and reduce the length of time treatment is needed.
- Break up large tasks into small ones, and do what you can as you can. Don't try to do too many things at once.
- Spend time with other people and talk to a friend or relative about your feelings.
- Discuss decisions with others who know you well. Do not make important decisions until you feel better.

If you're thinking about hurting yourself, get help quickly.

- Call 911, your doctor, or go to the emergency room
- Call a toll-free suicide hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The TTY number is 1-800-799-4TTY (4889).

Information adapted from: National Institute of Mental Health. (2013). *Men and Depression* (NIH Publication No. QF 11-5300). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

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