

Depression

Depression is a debilitating illness. It affects the whole person: physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. It can even disrupt your sleeping and eating patterns and your activity levels.

Major depression is a severe form of depression, but many people experience milder types of depression referred to as **minor depression** and **dysthymia**. Though milder than **major depression**, minor depression or

WHAT IS DYSTHYMIA?

Dysthymia is a chronic type of depression, where the symptoms last at least 2 years but are not as severe as major depression. The symptoms are persistent and, while not as disabling as in major depression, can keep a person from functioning well or feeling good.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or empty feelings
- Loss of pleasure in activities that were once enjoyable, including sex
- Frequently feeling guilty, worthless, hopeless, or helpless
- Persistent feelings of decreased energy, tiredness, or listlessness
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Disturbed sleep—sleeping too much or too little; insomnia, waking too early, or oversleeping
- Appetite loss or overeating
- Frequent feelings of either restlessness and irritability or feeling slowed down
- Thoughts of suicide or wishing you were dead

Persistent physical problems (such as headaches, stomach or bowel problems, and pain) that do not respond to treatment can also occur with depression

dysthymia can also disrupt your life.

Depression is a treatable illness. If you think you are experiencing any type of depression, see your doctor and he or she will work with you to find an appropriate treatment.

An article in the September 27, 2000, issue of *JAMA* reports on a study of treatments for dysthymia and minor depression. The researchers compared groups that received a drug treatment, a treatment that encouraged using problem-solving skills, and a control group who received placebo (inactive drug) treatment.

WHAT IS MINOR DEPRESSION?

Patients experiencing minor depression have fewer than 5 of the depression symptoms, have not had a major depression, and their symptoms have not persisted for 2 years.

WHAT IS MAJOR DEPRESSION?

In major depression, at least 5 of the types of symptoms listed under "Symptoms of Depression" persist nearly every day for at least 2 weeks. The symptoms interfere with your ability to live your life normally. Depression is a treatable disease, with many possible causes including chemical changes in the body. Some people may be genetically predisposed to depression.

GETTING TREATMENT:

If you have any of the symptoms of depression, see your doctor. He or she will evaluate you to see if the symptoms may be related to some other disease or condition, such as neurological or hormonal problems. If other causes have been ruled out, your doctor will discuss the various options for treating depression. Some treatments use medications and others use psychotherapy or "talk therapy" (regular visits with a psychiatrist or psychologist). Some treatment plans use a combination of drugs and psychotherapy.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- National Institute of Mental Health
800 421-4211 or www.nimh.nih.gov/
- American Psychiatric Association
Let's Talk Facts About ... Depression
1400 K St NW
Washington, DC 20005
Fax on demand 202/682-6000
or www.psych.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer. A *JAMA* Patient Page on depression was published on June 3, 1998.

Additional Sources: National Institute of Mental Health, American Psychiatric Association, *The AMA Complete Guide to Women's Health*, *The AMA Family Medical Guide*

Brian Pace, MA, Writer

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

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