

What Is Depression?

By Vincent J. Morello, Ph.D.

Yes, you can function on a day-to-day basis while suffering from clinical depression. In fact, in any given year more than 17 million people suffer from clinical depression. Clinical depression can often last from as little as a few weeks to as long as several months, or even years, and significantly impact daily living.

While some persons with depression are able to work or attend school, others can barely get out of bed. People with depression may display a smile, but no longer have enjoyment. They may feel sadness or at times not feel anything at all. Their concentration and memory are often reduced. They may sleep too much or too little or eat too much or too little. Things that were formerly pleasant no longer are. There is nothing they look forward to doing. Thoughts of suicide and suicidal behavior become a genuine concern. Making matters worse, people often place blame on themselves for being depressed.

Children, adolescents, adults, and older persons all can suffer from clinical depression. Traumatic and stressful events, such as losing a job or a family member, can trigger depression as well as biological factors, such as change in body chemistry or physical illness. Depression can affect the whole person, including our minds, emotions, moods, social activities, and bodily functions. People who experience depression can begin to think the future is hopeless and feel helpless in their ability to make positive changes. They can experience worry, become easily angered, and are sometimes irritable. Depression can limit a person's desire to care for their basic need; for example, not wanting to bathe or change their clothes. They can be more aware of pain in different parts of their body. They may withdraw from socialization, believing others do not care about them, which may limit their ability to obtain social supports.

People with depression may feel that others have abandoned them and do not receive the support they feel they deserve. Living with a person with depression can be very difficult and put a strain on friendships and family relationships. A person with depression may feel they do not want or need help, but believe that they will "snap out of it." While this could be possible, most people require help from an expert. Family members can participate in treatment if desired. This may not only assist in improving the symptoms of the individual but assist in repairing ruptured relationships with those they love.

We know that depression is highly related to numerous physical problems, such as cardiac conditions, hypertension, headaches, chronic pain, and muscular-skeletal pain, among others. While depression is more likely to strike those with a family history or those who previously had an episode of depression, anyone can be a candidate for the onset of depression.

There is substantial help available for those who may experience depression. Psychologists are expertly trained mental health providers, and can administer comprehensive assessments to help in identifying the depth and potential causes of increased depression symptoms. For some individuals negative and

distorted thinking patterns may promote depression, while others it may be due to ineffective coping skills or dysfunctional boundary setting. Psychologists can utilize a multitude of psychotherapy methods to assist people experiencing depression, such as hypnosis, family-based therapy, behavioral interventions, cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness, etc. Some persons can experience a dramatic improvement in symptoms after a few sessions; other persons may require more ongoing treatment. Psychologists may refer persons for medication to assist with the process. Depending on the severity of symptoms, research shows many individuals can benefit from a combination of psychotherapy and appropriate medication. Although medication can be quick to relieve some symptoms, psychotherapy assists in reducing the likelihood of relapse.

Talk to someone who can help. If you would like the name of a qualified psychologist in your area, please try our [Psychologist Locator](#).

Reviewed and Revised/Updated by: Whitney Robenolt, Psy.D. 2/20/2020