



# Understanding Depression



## What is depression?

Depression is an illness that affects the way you think and act as well as the way you feel. Being overwhelmed by the problems in your life and focusing too much on these problems can cause changes in the chemistry of your nervous system that can interfere with your daily activities and relationships at home and at work.

## How do I know if I am suffering from depression?

You should talk to your health care practitioner if you've had problems sleeping, if you are suddenly eating more or less than usual, or if you are losing interest in things you've always enjoyed in the past. You may have a hard time concentrating or remembering things. You may be tired more often and you may have thoughts of death or suicide. Frequent outbursts of anger or sadness are also signs that you could have depression.

## How does my health care practitioner make a diagnosis of depression?

The best way to find if you are suffering from depression is to talk about your symptoms with your health care practitioner. He or she will ask you certain questions about how you've been feeling, or ask you to complete a questionnaire that can help make an accurate diagnosis.

## What causes depression?

Changes like menopause or childbirth, changes in medication, surgery or illness, or an event such as the loss of a loved one can trigger depression. Sometimes it can appear suddenly, for no apparent reason. Many people can remember a family member who was affected by the illness. People who are depressed may abuse alcohol or drugs to avoid feeling depressed, but alcohol and drugs can often make it worse.

## What is the treatment for depression?

Depression is commonly treated with counseling, antidepressant medication or both. The choice of treatment depends on how severe your symptoms are, your medical history, and what you think will work best for you. Your health care practitioner can help you decide which treatment option is the best for you. If your health care practitioner starts you on antidepressant medication, it is very important for you to see him or her at least 3 times within the first 3 months. Your health care practitioner will check your progress and watch for any possible side effects of the medication.