No matter how depressed you are, you can feel better.

Most people have some kind of depression at some point in their lives. It can range from a minor problem to a major life-threatening illness.

If you have had five or more of the following symptoms nearly every day for more than two weeks, you may have depression:

- feeling sad, blue, tearful, hopeless, or down
- showing little interest or pleasure in things you used to enjoy (including sex)
- changes in appetite, causing you to gain or lose weight
- sleeping much more or less than usual
- feeling restless, irritable, or angry
- feeling tired or a loss of energy
- feeling worthless or a lot of guilt
- having a hard time concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- feeling like life isn’t worth living
- thinking about death or suicide

Self-care

Try some of these tips for taking care of yourself over the next two weeks. They may help you feel better.

Get moving.

Even if you aren’t in the mood for it, exercise is good for your mind and body. You will have more energy, reduce stress, and feel better. Exercise includes walking, bicycling, and swimming. Work your way up to 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.

Find joy again.

Believe it or not, pleasure is good for you! Think of things that you enjoy—big or small—and do them. It can be anything from listening to music or walking your dog, to spending time with friends. You may have to push yourself at first, but it will help you feel better.

Reach out.

Get in touch with friends or family. Depression can get worse if you isolate yourself. Meaningful contact with others can help you feel less lonely.

Check what you are eating.

It can be comforting to eat too many sweets or unhealthy foods when you feel low. Switch to healthier snacks and eat regular-sized portions.

Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and illegal drugs.

Many people start drinking more caffeine or alcohol; or take illegal drugs to help them feel better. But these can make things worse and interfere with prescribed medicines. Get support for making healthier choices.
Herbs and supplements.
Some research shows that an herb
called St. John’s Wort may help
mild to moderate depression.
However, there are safety concerns.
It is not regulated by the Food
and Drug Administration, and it
can change how other medications
work. If you are thinking about
using St. John’s Wort, be sure to
talk to your doctor or other health
care professional.

What to do when self-care
doesn’t work
No matter how depressed you are,
you can feel better. Self-care may
be enough to pull you out of a
mild depression. For a more serious
depression, professional help may
be needed.

The good news is that medical
treatment can help symptoms of
depression. Treatment includes
counseling, medication, classes, and
self-care. You can get professional
treatment at Kaiser Permanente in
the Department of Psychiatry or
Mental Health. Health care pro-
fessionals in the Department of
Medicine can also treat you with
medications.

Call Kaiser Permanente if . . .
• you have thoughts of suicide
• home treatment doesn’t help lift
your mood within two weeks
• you have five or more symptoms
of depression nearly every day
for two or more weeks

Herbs and supplements are
sold over-the-counter. Kaiser
Permanente pharmacies carry
only herb categories for which
evidence exists to show that
they may be effective to treat
specific medical conditions.

Be positive.
As you start these steps, tell your-
self you are doing the right things
to lighten your mood. Look for
signs that your depression is getting
better, such as going back to activ-
ities you enjoy or connecting with
friends. Remind yourself that
these are positive steps.

Additional resources
• Connect to our Web site at kp.org
to access health and drug ency-
clopedias, interactive programs,
health classes, and more.
• Check your Kaiser Permanente
Healthwise Handbook, and read
the section on “Mental Wellness.”
• Contact your local Kaiser
Permanente Health Education
Center or Department for health
information, programs, and other
resources.

Books
• Self-Esteem, Matthew McKay and
Patrick Fanning, New Harbinger
Publications Inc. (1992)
• The Mind & Body Health
Handbook (formerly titled The
Healthy Mind Healthy Body
Handbook), David Sobel and
Robert Ornstein, DRx (1998)
• The Feeling Good Handbook,
David Burns, Plume (1999)

Hotlines
• National Depressive/Manic
Depressive Association
1-800-826-3632
• National Drug and Alcohol
Treatment Hotline
1-800-662-4357
• National Institute of Mental Health
1-800-647-2642

Web sites
• kp.org
• kp.org/depression
• kp.org/mindbody
• Want a customized online stress
management plan? Check out our
HealthMedia® Relax™ Healthy
Lifestyle program at
kp.org/healthylifestyles
• National Institute of Mental Health
nimh.nih.gov

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive
from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you
have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information
about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the
medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.