



Together we can work to keep you healthy.

Feeling moody and irritable are **not** just part of being a teen.

Does life seem a lot harder lately? Have you been feeling empty or worthless? It could be depression.

Most people feel down at some point in their lives. Depression is different. It can range from a minor problem to a major life-threatening illness. Fortunately, there are treatments that work well for teens who are depressed.

Risk factors for depression

There are many risk factors that may lead to depression, including:

- a family history of depression

- losing a parent or someone else close
- break-up of a romantic relationship
- being injured or dealing with a chronic illness
- abuse or neglect
- fighting or other problems in your family
- dealing with lots of stress
- smoking cigarettes
- wondering if you are gay, lesbian, or bisexual
- traumatic events, such as a natural disaster, a car accident, or robbery
- Have you been waking up very early in the morning, not able to go back to sleep?
- Have your sleep patterns changed, either sleeping a lot more, or a lot less?
- Have you been feeling really bad about yourself, or have you been really hard on yourself lately?
- Have you been thinking a lot about death and dying?

How do I know if I'm depressed?

Feeling upset or down now and then is normal, but depression is different. Here is a way to help you find out if you're depressed:

- Have you been feeling sad, scared, or empty inside?
- Have you been losing interest in hobbies, sports, or social activities, where things just don't seem fun anymore?
- Have you been feeling more and more jumpy or angry?
- Have you been having trouble getting along with your family or friends?
- Has your appetite changed, causing you to gain or lose weight?
- Has your energy level changed, making you really tired, restless, or irritable?

If you answered yes to two or more of these questions, you may be depressed. If you've been feeling this way for several weeks or longer, please call your health care professional right away. We're here to help.

Alcohol and other drugs

If you're depressed, you may also have problems with alcohol or other drugs. (Alcohol is a drug, too.) Sometimes the depression comes first and drugs are an attempt to feel better. Other times, the drinking or drug use comes first. This can actually be the cause of depression (or it can make it worse). Whatever comes first, if you're drinking alcohol or using other drugs and think you may be depressed, it is important to admit to yourself that you have both of these problems. Get treatment as soon as possible.

Treatment options

Depression can be successfully treated with therapy, medication, or a combination of both. With the right treatment, 80 percent of people who reach out for help get better. In fact, many people start to feel better in just a few weeks.

What teens can do

- Talk to a caring adult, like a parent, favorite aunt or uncle, a teacher, counselor, or someone at your church, mosque, or synagogue, and tell him or her how you are feeling.
- Stay close to family and friends, even though you might want to be alone a lot.
- Get professional help from a counselor, therapist, doctor, or other medical professional.
- Accept that depression is not your fault. Depression is a medical condition – not a lack of will power.
- Take care of yourself. Make sure you're sleeping at least 8 hours a night, and eating three well-balanced meals a day. Make an effort to get some exercise, even if you don't really feel like it. Try expressing your feelings by talking with a friend or by writing (or drawing) in a journal. Plan to do something enjoyable each day. Try to remember how you felt when you were happier.

What parents can do

- Talk with your teen and let him or her know that you care and want to help. Don't assume that a teen's moodiness is "just a phase." Try to look beyond disruptive behavior – it may be a cry for help.
- Have your teen evaluated for depression. You can get information from a school counselor, the child and adolescent psychiatry clinic, the teen clinic, or the Health Education Center at your local Kaiser Permanente.
- Lock up medications that may be deadly, or don't keep them around at all.
- Remove all guns from the home, including hunting rifles.
- Discuss the dangers of alcohol and drugs, explaining to teens that they are especially vulnerable to accidents and addiction.
- Keep track of the warning signs you observe so that you can discuss them with your teen's doctor or therapist. Make a special note about when and how often symptoms occur.
- Talk with your teen's therapist. Discuss your questions and concerns about treatment.

Prevent suicide

Thoughts of death or suicide are usually signs of severe depression. If you feel like you can't cope anymore, or that life isn't worth living, it's really important to get help. Suicidal feelings, thoughts, impulses, or behavior should always be taken seriously. If you are thinking of hurting or killing yourself, contact someone you trust to help you:

- a good friend
- a parent or trusted family member
- staff at the student health or counseling center
- a teacher, coach, or advisor

Another good option is to call a local suicide hotline, or the national suicide prevention hotline: 1-800-suicide (1-800-784-2433). You can also go to any nearby hospital emergency room or call 911.

Other resources

- Kaiser Permanente's Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Department
- 24-hour California Youth Crisis Hotline: 1-800-843-5200
- Alcohol and Drugs Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP

Web sites

- Visit our Web site at kp.org for more information on this and other topics of interest to parents and teens.
- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: aacap.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics: aap.org
- National Institute of Mental Health: nimh.org

Books

- *The Feeling Good Handbook*, Burns
- *More Than Moody: recognizing and treating adolescent depression*, Harold S. Koplewicz
- *Mind Over Mood*, Greenberger and Padesky
- If you are being hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or being pressured to have sex, it can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474 or connect to loveisrespect.org.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems 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.