

We all feel down in the dumps at times. Disappointment, discouragement, irritability, sadness, grief after a loss, – these are all natural and common experiences. How can you tell if you (or someone you know) are just feeling blue and going through a ‘moody stage,’ or are experiencing depression? Depression is more than just an extreme form of sadness. It is an illness that may be caused by both situational and/or physiological factors. Some depressions are triggered by body chemistry, some people are genetically predisposed to depression, and sometimes stress, life events, or another medical illness contribute to feelings of depression. The good news is that depression is very treatable.

Following are warning signs of depression. If at least 5 of these symptoms have been present daily for at least 2 weeks then it is important to consult with a mental health professional to determine the best course of action.

- Increase or decrease in appetite
- Sleeping more or less than usual, difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Changes in energy level
- Fatigue or restlessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in previously enjoyable activities
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions, drop in school grades
- Thoughts of suicide or death

These symptoms are usually accompanied by serious distress and difficulty maintaining social, school, or work responsibilities. For some people, while they seem to be functioning as usual, everything takes much more effort than it used to.

Remember that there are many very effective treatments for depression. Numerous people have benefited from psychotherapy, many find relief with medication, and oftentimes a combination of both forms of treatment is used. It is not helpful, however, to tell a person with depression to ‘just snap out of it.’ True depression is a medical condition, not laziness or willfulness, but with treatment and support symptom relief is possible.