

Depression is perhaps the most common mental disorder in the world, affecting more than 264 million people worldwide. ([https://www.who.int/health-topics/depression#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/depression#tab=tab_1))

It is a mood disorder, usually characterised by sadness, hopelessness, loss of interest in things you would normally enjoy, tiredness, loss of appetite and poor concentration.

It is important to note that feeling sad, lonely or even depressed some days, or when something upsetting has happened, is common and completely normal, however if that feeling persists for a long time, or is recurrent, then you could be dealing with depression.

For a clinical diagnosis of the same, the symptoms must last at least 2 weeks, and indicate a change from your previous behavioural patterns.

Depression can be divided into categories depending on the severity and longevity of the symptoms.

One of these is Major Depressive Disorder – which is further classified into mild, moderate or severe, depending on the severity of the symptoms exhibited and/or seasonal pattern, or psychotic features.

The symptoms that must be present (for at least 2 weeks) for one to be diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder are :

- Feeling depressed or irritable most of the day, every day
- Losing interest or pleasure in activities you would usually enjoy
- Sleep difficulties, sleeping (too much or too little)
- Changes in motor activity
- Low energy or fatigue
- Changes in weight
- Feeling worthless
- Lack of concentration
- Suicidal thoughts or tendencies

It must also be noted that women are twice as likely as men to experience depression.

Moderate Depression, as in the moderate expression of symptoms in Major Depressive Disorder, may cause difficulties in work, school, home or social living.

## **Causes**

There is no single thing that causes depression, and there could be a myriad of reasons as to its onset. Some of these include :-

- Genetics
- Having parents or other family members with depression
- Having another mental health condition
- Poverty
- Certain Medications, including steroids
- alcohol or drug use

- certain medical conditions, such as cancer or [hypothyroidism](#)
- abuse during childhood
- Stress, or changes in the balance of hormones

## **Diagnosis**

In order to ascertain if it's depression, or some underlying disease with the same symptoms, your doctor might perform some physical check-ups, ask questions about your medical history, or conduct some lab tests.

Your doctor will also ask you about your symptoms, how long you have been experiencing them, and how they have been affecting your life.

Doctors and professionals use the the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition \(DSM-5\)](#), which lays out some guidelines to be help appropriate the diagnosis. It lays out 9 symptoms, out of which 5 must be present for at least 2 weeks, for you to be diagnosed with Clinical Depression.

These are the same symptoms as listed earlier :-

- Feeling depressed or irritable most of the day, every day
- Losing interest or pleasure in activities you would usually enjoy
- Sleep difficulties, sleeping (too much or too little)
- Changes in motor activity
- Low energy or fatigue
- Changes in weight
- Feeling worthless
- Lack of concentration
- Suicidal thoughts or tendencies

People diagnosed with Moderate Depression have a harder time with work and home, than others diagnosed with Mild Depression. It may become hard to deal with completing daily tasks, or with fatigue and lack of motivation, and even maintaining social relationships.

Your doctor will also want to cross off other mental health conditions such as -

1. Persistent Depressive Disorders (dysthymia) - A mild but long-term form of depression.
2. Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorders - A severe, sometimes disabling extension of premenstrual syndrome (PMS).
3. Bipolar Disorders - Bipolar disorder is a mental illness marked by extreme shifts in mood. Symptoms can include an extremely elevated mood called mania.

## **Treatments**

Moderate Depression may be treated by medications, psychotherapy, or a combination of the two. Sometimes, even lifestyle changes can help ease the symptoms.

- **Medications**

Most health care-takers kick off the treatment of MDD(Major Depressive Disorder) with antidepressants.

SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors) are perhaps the most commonly prescribed antidepressants, and work by helping inhibit the breakdown of serotonin in the brain, resulting in higher amounts of this neurotransmitter.

Serotonin is a brain chemical that is believed to be responsible for mood. It is even called the 'happy chemical' – because it is believed to raise moods.

It is often held that depressed people have low levels of serotonin in their brains, so what SSRIs do is essentially increasing the amount of serotonin available in the brain.

SSRIs include drugs like sertraline (Zoloft), fluoxetine (Prozac), citalopram(Celexa) and paroxetine (Paxil).

There are also certain other medications like SNRIs (Serotonin and Non-epinephrine reuptake inhibitors), monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), atypical antidepressants, and tricyclic antidepressants.

But SNRIs are more commonly prescribed due to their lesser side-effects.

- **Psychotherapy**

Also known as Psychological Therapy, it involves the affected person meeting with a psychotherapist on a regular basis. It can be an effective method of treatment.

The treatment focuses on the identification and elimination of thoughts that could be contributing to the symptoms, as well as replacing those thoughts with more positive ones.

The treatment might be spread out over 15 sessions, and the psychotherapist might even ask you to practise the skills you learnt in the session.

The types of thinking that could lead to depression are :-

1. Magnifying problems
2. Taking things too personally
3. Thinking in extremes
4. Overgeneralising your issues
5. Ignoring the positive experiences of your life

- **Lifestyle Changes**

