



Depression

Approximately 1 in 10 American adults suffer from depression, and most people who have the condition are taking antidepressant medications—the third most commonly prescribed category of drugs in America.

Depression is a persistent feeling of sadness and hopelessness. It's more than just the occasional blues. To diagnose depression, your healthcare provider will want to know how many of the following symptoms you've experienced on a near daily basis for two weeks or more:

- Feelings of sadness, emptiness, or irritability
- Decreased interest in or pleasure from any daily activities
- Changes in weight or appetite
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in activity levels
- Loss of energy and fatigue
- Inappropriate or excessive feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Inability to concentrate or indecisiveness
- Thoughts of suicide and death

In some people, depression is mild and manageable. In others, who are categorized as having a major depressive disorder, the symptoms can be debilitating.

Contributing Factors

When diagnosing depression, your healthcare provider will try to find underlying causes that can be addressed. For instance, premenstrual syndrome, eating disorders, pain, irritable bowel syndrome, and other illnesses can all contribute to depression.

Other conditions that can look like depression include autoimmune disorders, blood sugar problems, and hormonal imbalances. In addition, there's a strong link between inflammation and depression.

Treatment Options

While most conventional doctors and psychiatrists treat depression with drugs known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), a number of integrative healthcare providers look for more holistic approaches to the problem. The scientific literature shows that SSRIs are not very effective for most people, and they come with a host of side effects.

An integrative approach includes correcting problems such as nutrient deficiencies, hormonal imbalances, and inflammation. This begins with several lifestyle approaches:

- Eating whole, minimally processed foods—preferably a Paleo-style diet
- Addressing sleep issues
- Encouraging relaxation through practices like meditation and yoga
- Increasing activity levels

Some herbs, spices, and supplements can also help with depression:

- Folate and B12
- Probiotics
- S-AMe
- Vitamin D
- Essential fatty acids
- Inositol
- Amino acids
- Adaptogenic herbs such as ashwaganda (*Withania somnifera*) or *Rhodiola rosea*

It's important to remember that in order to heal the brain, we need to heal the entire body. That means looking at each individual's history and current health to find and treat contributors to depression. Integrative practitioners, who focus on a whole-person approach to health, are well suited to do this.