

Antidepressants

There are several different types of antidepressants available.³ Antidepressants need to be taken regularly for several weeks before they begin to work.³ The majority of people will need to continue taking their antidepressant for 6 to 12 months to prevent relapse.³ Occasionally treatment with one drug does not relieve depression, in which case a different type of antidepressant may be used or a combination of antidepressants may be prescribed.³

Antidepressants work on the neurotransmitters in the brain.¹

Types of antidepressants:³

- Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)
- Serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs)
- Norepinephrine-dopamine reuptake inhibitors
- Other serotonin modulators
- Tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs)
- Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs)

Important facts about depression:

- Depression is an illness that is treatable¹
- Depression has physical causes and therefore requires specific treatment³
- Depression does not reflect a weakness of character and cannot be willed or wished away^{2,3}
- The road to recovery may be difficult and setbacks may occur, but the sadness and dark thoughts will gradually improve³

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Adcock Ingram Healthcare (Pty) Ltd. Reg. No. 2007/019928/07
Private Bag X69, Bryanston, 2021,
South Africa. Tel. +27 11 635 0000
www.adcock.com
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DEPRESSION?



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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DEPRESSION

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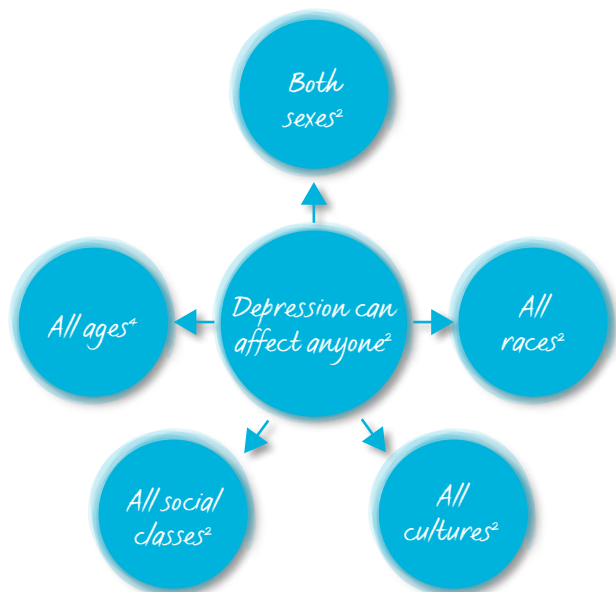
What is depression?

Depression is a common but serious illness affecting 20 % of people at some point in their lives.^{1,2}

While the word 'depression' is often used to describe the sad or discouraged feelings that result from distressing events such as poor health, financial problems or death of a loved one, these feelings are temporary and pass over time (usually within a couple of days).^{3,4} These short-lived feelings of sadness are not considered an illness or disorder.³

Depression is considered an illness when the intense feelings of sadness are long lasting and enough to interfere with the person's ability to function at home or at work.^{2,3} The person has a decreased interest or pleasure in activities they once enjoyed.³ Depression may occur as a result of a stressor or loss of a loved one, but is out of proportion to that event and lasts beyond an appropriate length of time.³

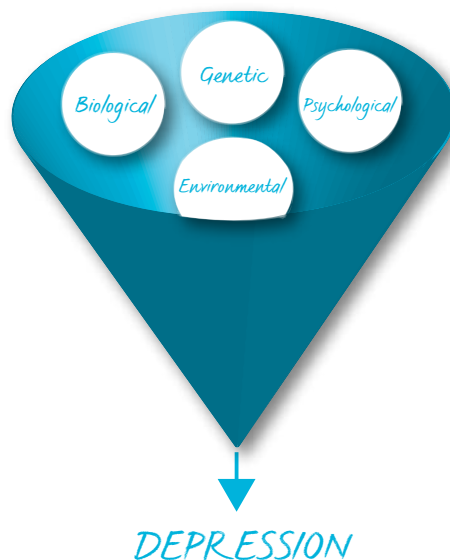
Who is affected by depression?



Depression occurs more commonly in women than men.² It can occur at almost any age, including childhood, but typically develops during the mid-teens, 20's or 30's.^{2,3,4}

What causes depression?

The exact cause of depression is not known.⁴ A combination of genetic, biological, environmental and psychological factors are likely to contribute to its development.^{1,4}



Chemical substances called neurotransmitters help nerve cells communicate with each other. It is thought that imbalances in the levels of these neurotransmitters may play a role in depression.^{1,3,4}

Heredity plays a role as there is a tendency for depression to run in some families.³

Major life events, especially separations and losses, can trigger depression in a person predisposed to the condition.^{3,4}

Some people develop depressive symptoms during autumn and winter when there are shorter daylight hours and colder temperatures.^{3,4} The depressive symptoms may be severe enough to be considered a type of depression known as seasonal affective disorder.^{3,4}

Depression may occur with or be caused by several diseases.^{3,4} Certain prescription drugs may cause depression in some patients and the abuse of recreational drugs may also lead to depression.⁴

People who have suffered from depression previously are more likely to develop it again.⁴

What are the signs and symptoms of depression?

Symptoms develop gradually over time and can vary significantly.³ Not every person with depression will experience every symptom listed.² Some may experience a few of the symptoms listed while others may experience many.² The severity of the symptoms experienced may also vary significantly between different people.²

Signs and symptoms include:^{1,2}

- Persistent sad, anxious or 'empty' feelings
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Irritability, restlessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Loss of sexual desire
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions
- Sleep disturbances such as insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Overeating, or appetite loss
- Thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain
- Deterioration of social relationships

How is depression treated?

If suitable treatment is received, depression symptoms can be alleviated in 80 % of people suffering with this disease.^{2,5} Sadly, most people suffering from this disease do not receive the help they need, either because their depression goes unrecognised or they do not realise that they have a treatable illness.^{2,5}

Mild depression is generally managed with psychotherapy.^{3,4} Your doctor will be there for support and will monitor your progress.³

Moderate to severe depression is treated with medication, psychotherapy or both.^{3,4} Sometimes electroconvulsive therapy is necessary in severe cases of depression.³ For electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), electrodes are placed on the head and an electrical current is applied to induce a seizure in the brain.³ The procedure is performed under general anaesthesia and can usually relieve depression very rapidly.³