

Got Depression?

Depression is a mood disorder that affects about 7% of the U.S. population. Typical symptoms include feeling so sad or empty that you can't shake the feeling. When you're clinically depressed, it's hard to get to sleep or stay asleep at night, and you may lose your appetite. Normally pleasurable activities are no longer fun. You have little energy to get things started, and you lack motivation to get things done. You stop participating in activities and tend to withdraw from friends and family. You may stay home from work or skip school. The future starts to look hopeless and you feel helpless to do anything about it. Ultimately you feel worthless as a human being. When these symptoms persist life no longer seems worth living, and you start thinking about suicide.

Depression is caused by a combination of factors. Certain genetic factors raise the risk for depression, and it definitely runs in families. Depressed persons typically have lower levels of certain neurotransmitters (the chemicals that fire neurons in your brain) that affect emotions and behavior, and this brain chemistry may well be inherited. Stressful life events such as personal loss or trauma can also lead to depression, by altering the expression of genes that affect brain chemistry and also by producing stress hormones that affect emotions. Some personality types are also prone to depression due to repeated habits of thinking and behaving that lead to failure experiences and low levels of reinforcement. No single combination of factors is exactly the same for everybody, and thus the course of depression and its symptom pattern will vary from person to person.

Depression involves how you think, act, and feel. Typically when you are depressed you don't merely feel sad but rather flat or empty, unable to feel a wide range of emotions. Behaviorally you slow down and take longer to get things done. Your attention and focus become narrow, and you spend more time ruminating about your problems or your failures. You become more rigid in your thinking and unable to generate new ideas when problem solving. You are also more likely to discount other people's ideas as being unworkable.

The good news is that there are effective treatments for depression. Such treatments include medications, behavioral activation, and psychotherapy. Medications typically help restore neurotransmitters or hormone levels to a normal range. Behavioral activation refers to strategies that increase activity and energy (through aerobic or other exercise) and expose you to more pleasurable activities. Psychotherapy involves challenging maladaptive thinking patterns, increasing meaningful interactions with other people, and refocusing attention on here-and-now experiences (mindfulness) and away from the "mental ruts" that are a hallmark of depressed thinking.

Psychological Services of Pendleton, LLC, offers all three modalities of treatment. We can also refer you to other treatment providers in Eastern Oregon upon request.

For more information about depression, check out this website at the National Institutes of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml